

# **Racial Discourse among White Afrikaans-speaking Youth: A Stellenbosch Case Study**

by

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This study seeks to present a picture of the racial discourses circulating among white Afrikaans-speaking youth in South Africa, with closer focus to students at the Stellenbosch University (SU). Fifteen years into democracy, Afrikaans-speaking whites find themselves in a position where their 'Afrikaner' identity does not enjoy the same government-supported security as under apartheid. The responsibility is thus shifted onto white Afrikaans-speakers themselves to negotiate and secure this identity in the light of new challenges brought on by the post-apartheid context. In this regard, the white Afrikaans-speaking youth, in particular, are faced with the ambivalence of being both exposed to a habitual scheme of normalised racial divisions, as well as to a context where 'old' frameworks need to be transcended in the name of survival in multi-racial South Africa.

SU, a historically white, predominantly Afrikaans-medium university, is currently faced with the challenges of government-induced transformation and the attended 'language debate', the aims of which are to make the university more accessible to non-white sectors of society who, under apartheid, was excluded from this institution. Making use of interviews and participant observation among students on the SU campus, an attempt was made to shed light onto the types of discourses employed by white Afrikaans-speaking Stellenbosch students to negotiate their position in this setting, as well as to determine to what extent such discourses are racially based. With the help of a social anthropological approach to discourse analysis, the discourses encountered during fieldwork were considered within the context of macro-historical processes, and were conceptualised as complex sets of meanings produced within the context of interaction, appropriated and employed by individuals, strategically and artistically, in response to moment to moment situations.

It is argued that these discursive processes are immensely complex, as it is influenced and shaped by a plethora of factors. These youth are, firstly, faced with a received framework in which dualistic and racial distinctions are subconsciously reproduced. Secondly, they take part in a rhetoric in which group boundaries manage to reproduce itself and, lastly, they are exposed to a popular discourse, reinforced by the media, that strongly relies on race-based sense-making. However, politically induced transformation ideals do call for a readjustment of priorities within white 'Afrikaner' discourse and students have been observed to respond

to this in creative ways. Finally, it is argued that the heavy emotional baggage accompanying the race topic, exacerbated by media emphasis and the 'racist taboo', can lead to denial and indifference among white Afrikaans-speakers so that no space is created for constructive engagement with the topic.

## Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie studie is om 'n voostelling van 'ras-diskoers' daar te stel soos wat dit onder die wit Afrikaanssprekende jeug in Suid-Afrika voorkom, met spesifieke verwysing na studente van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch (US). Tydens die skryf van hierdie tesis is dit reeds vyftien jaar in die 'nuwe Suid-Afrika'. Waar Afrikaanssprekende blankes se 'Afrikaner' identiteit destyds deur die apartheidsregering beskerm en bevorder is, berus die verantwoordelikheid tans op hierdie groep self om hul identiteitsbelange te beskerm en te onderhandel in die lig van nuwe uitdagings. In hierdie opsig is die fokus veral op die jeug aangesien die raamwerke wat dikwels tuis aan hul oorgedra is, nou moet plek maak vir 'n nuwe manier van dink wat aanpas by blootstelling aan veelrassigheid op alle gebiede in Suid-Afrika, in hierdie geval op die universiteitskampus.

Die US, 'n historiese wit, hoofsaaklik Afrikaans-medium universiteit, word tans in die gesig gestaar deur kwessies rondom 'transformasie' en die 'taaldebat', deurdat aan die regering se vereistes voldoen moet word om die instelling meer toeganklik te maak vir 'n sektor van die samelewing wat onder apartheid toegang tot sulke universiteite geweier is. Met behulp van onderhoude en deelnemende waarneming by die US is gepoog om vas te stel hoe wit Afrikaanssprekende studente in hierdie konteks hul eie posisie verstaan en onderhandel, en tot watter mate die diskoers waarmee hul sin maak van hul omgewing, ras-gebaseerd is. Die studie maak gebruik van 'n sosiaal-antropologiese benadering tot diskoers analise. In hierdie opsig word diskoers beskou binne die konteks van makro-historiese prosesse, en word dit verstaan as betekenis wat op komplekse wyse gegenereer word tydens interaksie, betekenis wat op hul beurt strategies en op kreatiewe wyses toegeëien en aangewend word in reaksie op situasies.

Daar word aangedui hoedat die diskursiewe praktyke wat hierdie diskoers ondelê, uiters kompleks is deurdat dit beïnvloed en gevorm word deur 'n verkeidenheid van faktore. Eerstens is daar 'n oorgeërfde raamwerk waarin dualistiese raamwerke wat ras-onderskeid reproduceer, onbewustelik seëvier. Tweedens is daar 'n landwye kulturele retoriek wat die idee van grense tussen groepe as onoorbrugbaar voorstel, en laastens word 'n populêre diskoers, wat sterk staatmaak op 'n ras-gebaseerde verstaan van die Suid-Afrikaanse

samelewing, dikwels deur die media versterk. Ten spyte van bogenoemde, is daar egter ook waargeneem hoedat studente grootliks bewus is van die polities-gemotiveerde transformasiedoelwitte wat vereis dat die prioriteite vervat in wit Afrikaanssprekende diskoers, daarby aanpas. Laastens word egter ook geredeneer dat die swaar emosionele bagasie wat met die ras-onderwerp gepaard gaan, onder andere die groot taboe rondom 'rassisme', op die ou end onder wit Afrikaanssprekende student lei tot apatie en ignorering van die onderwerp, wat konstruktiewe bespreking daaroor kan belemmer.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale

The choice on a topic for this Master's thesis came as fairly easily and self-evident as I knew it would be something that could be aligned with a larger research project that was in operation at that moment, centering on Afrikaner identity, race, culture, youth and the *Taaldebat* (Language Debate) at Stellenbosch. Also, the year before embarking on this study (2007), I had done a small-scale honours project on the 'De la Rey phenomenon'. A song commemorating a Boer hero, General De la Rey, became a sensation among white Afrikaans-speaking youth, inspiring them to assert their identity and unique Afrikaner needs with new-found vigour. This could be located in a context where many members of the white Afrikaner youth, at that stage, thirteen years into the post-apartheid regime, experienced feelings of marginalisation by the black-led government, as well as loss of identity, and were *gatvol* (sick and tired) of being blamed for an oppressive apartheid era during which many were not even born yet. Evidently, I knew that my Master's thesis topic would somehow continue with this line of thought, and that I would want to link my research to this wider project surrounding Afrikaner identity, particularly the youth.

It was suggested to me that regarding white Afrikaans-speaking youth, some more research could still be done around 'race'. Without any further deliberation, I immediately proceeded to generate a topic, intent on looking at the discourses surrounding racial experience among white Afrikaans-speaking Stellenbosch students. This compelled me to immerse myself in race debates circulating at Stellenbosch University, the media and in South Africa at large. Only halfway into the project did I realize the daunting task that I let myself in for. In South Africa, even if one is completely indifferent to racial politics, or tries one's best to sidestep any race-related involvement, one will still be confronted with 'race' on a daily basis. Consequently, going on an intentional mission to seek and identify 'race' throughout society, the extreme extent to which it is seen to permeate society is overwhelming. Especially analyzing these circulating racial dynamics to their finest elements became a personal, emotionally disconcerting experience, so that I started to question the self-evidentiality with which I embarked on this topic. At Stellenbosch University students are on a daily basis confronted with race, in some sites such as residences almost to the extent of being overwhelmed. Considered against the background of the De la Rey phenomenon, how

do white Afrikaans-speaking students make sense of this racial experience, or, alternatively, how do they make sense of their experience, given the racial preoccupations of their environment?

It has come to the fore that 'racial discourse' forms an important part of post-apartheid Afrikaner youth dynamics (Barnard, 2007). The way in which interviewees in a previous research project spoke about and reflected on their 'Afrikaner' identity, served as a clear reminder of the importance of the racial other in defining the 'Afrikaner' self. Thus, I became particularly interested not only in how racialised thought patterns structure the experience of white Afrikaans-speaking youth, but also how this world view is reinforced and sustained through everyday discourse.

Various studies (Fourie, 2008; Schutte, 1995; Steyn, 2004, Vestergaard, 2001) have focused on post-apartheid Afrikaner experience, particularly their reactions to the loss of political power and their material and identity-related security. In recent years a new focus has shifted to white Afrikaans-speaking youth, especially considering the fast-growing Afrikaans music industry (Drewett, 2002). Other areas in which focus on white Afrikaans-speaking youth has emerged, have been firstly, the rekindling of the 'race debate' that followed the De la Rey controversy (Van der Waal and Robins, 2008), secondly, some recent race related incidents, e.g. the Reitz incident at the University of the Free State, and lastly, the Stellenbosch University language debate (Van der Waal, 2008). Especially key in the area of Afrikaner students' experience in the higher education environment is Jansen (2009), a 'non-white' academic, currently rector of the University of the Free State, who relates his own experience with Afrikaner students during his office as Dean at the historically white and Afrikaans medium University of Pretoria. The focus of this thesis connects to his views, in that the white Afrikaans-speaking youth are seen as currently coming to terms with and negotiating a role for themselves within the current South African context. This occurs through a process of utilising various resources, ranging from an inherited apartheid-informed racial worldview to what is perceived as the post apartheid ideals and liberal democratic values. The reason for applying myself particularly to the white Afrikaans-speaking youth is because many perceive themselves as playing no part in South Africa's oppressive history, feeling that the legacy of this history was merely handed down to them from their parents. It would be interesting to examine how this transfer of historical legacy

occurs and how Afrikaans youth of my generation are not merely passive recipients of this, but actively incorporate such information into their own discourse in unique ways, appropriating it to their current unique circumstances. The research thus aims to contribute to current research on 'Afrikaner' youth, race, culture and identity.

Studies on the white Afrikaans-speaking youth have only recently gained momentum, and, though their racialised experiences are mentioned, this study aims to delve deeper into the race aspect. Consciousness of a racial 'other' proved to be a very prevalent underlying theme to the discourse under study, even though great effort was put into denying such consciousness by respondents through, for instance, the avoidance of using racial terms or substituting with a rhetoric based on cultural difference. More importantly, though, studies about Afrikaner racialised experience have thus far been quite fixed on right-wing dynamics, neglecting to identify the contradictions or ambivalences contained in what is often perceived or represented by the media as unquestionably 'racist discourse'. Identifying these ambivalences might shed light on how the dynamics of discourse among white Afrikaans youth may be indicative of an attempt at coming to terms, or aligning themselves, with what is deemed acceptable in the post-apartheid context.

An attempt will thus be made to identify incompatible messages and influences from outside – the media, organisations, parents, and peer groups – which heighten the challenge faced by the white Afrikaans-speaking youth in their attempts at forming a seemingly 'coherent' discourse on race and identity issues. There seems to be a tendency occasionally to rebel against the confusion imposed upon them, at times culminating into racial extremism, characterised by hate speech and violence. This tendency is particularly noticed on internet blogs or discussion groups where participants identify with each other on the basis of a shared experience of 'marginalisation' perceived to be induced by the non-white, non-Afrikaans-speaking South African majority. Here, expressed sentiments can culminate into quite explicit, even derogatory, race-based remarks. Identifying the sources of such confusion leading to resistance, e.g. as generated by media portrayals, will then bring one a step closer to explaining the phenomenon of renewed racial conflict and upsurge in the last few years. The complexity of Afrikaner youth racial discourse will be revealed by indicating how, instead of being oriented towards a single set of assumptions (e.g. aimed at white privilege), it is being informed and influenced by various institutions

and ideas. This set of incompatible messages can be seen as complicating the identity negotiation process, shedding a possible light on why the road to the racial tolerance ideal is littered with speed bumps in stead of following a smooth course. By situating such tendencies toward resistance within the current socio-historic context faced by the population under study, the aim is to arrive at a deeper understanding of how current racial discourses (note the plural as there is no single coherent discourse) are shaped and maintained.

## 1.2 Objective

One aspect of the study will be concerned with the way everyday discourse among young white Afrikaans-speakers is racialised, and the way in which these racialised ideas are utilised to make sense of everyday experience. Describing variations in different settings, where it is utilised, and where not, as well as the different forms it takes in various settings, requires a multi-sited approach. Such varying forms of racial discourse might convey something about how people come to terms with the positions they find themselves in, pointing to strategies in which they negotiate a legitimate space for themselves within particular situations. A challenge white 'Afrikaner' youth seems to be facing is to develop a meaningful racial logic in the face of contradictory and confusing influences from both 'among' and 'above': parents, peers, media and the entertainment industry. Another challenge linked to this is that of reconciling racist legacies of the past with current-day ('non-racial') ideological expectations.

The problem may thus be formulated as such: the salience of racial discourse is not merely a reaction to feeling threatened, but is interwoven into more complex post-apartheid dynamics, among others, of bringing discourse into alignment with what is deemed acceptable in current national ideology. In this sense it is not so much race-related incidents themselves that provide substantial material for analysis, but more specifically the discourse utilised to make sense of such incidences and other experiences by white Afrikaans-speaking youth wherein strategies to overcome the ambivalences brought forth by 'race debates' are generated.

The object of study will be the discourses (both what is being said and how, and what is not being said, i.e. including non-verbal cues as well as frameworks in which experiences are

interpreted) on the one hand, as manifested through various institutions, like the media and some Afrikaner organisations, and on the other hand, the reaction as well as interaction taking place among adherents of a particular set of meanings (reciprocal influencing, or how the present audience influences what is being said or not said). Silence can be a very notable signifier of which issues carry most gravity and this will be elaborated on further. In short, the main object of study will thus constitute discourse among the white Afrikaans youth, and will be situated within the context of discourse as manifested by the wider public, particularly the media. Units of analysis will comprise individuals, along with their social actions, focusing on face-to-face interaction by means of interviews, as well as on collective or group action and patterned social action by means of observation.

The study will revolve around questions aiming to provide descriptive as well as explanatory information: to what extent are essentialist racial ideas still carried over generationally, reinforced, even transcended, by newer generations, and for what purposes is it then reinforced? What is currently happening around the notion of the racial world view in South Africa, with regards to its new generation 'racists'? How are old racial ideas appropriated for today where subjects face new or different kinds of challenges? How is this process coupled with influences from various other current-day sources? In which ways do the undergoing of a paradigm shift, on the one hand, and hardening resistance against perceived drastic changes on the other, form part of the process of coming to terms with the new situation? Consequently, what is the role of the youth in potentially occupying a position at the leading end of such shifts or resistance, or both?

Turning to my particular focus on discourse, it is worth bearing in mind that discourse always fulfils an instrumental purpose. Thus, after the framework and assumptions on which these discourses rely have been identified along with a set of terminologies and conceptualisations, I can go on to ask: What functions do these tendencies and narratives identified within these discourses fulfil? What effects are they trying to achieve? In what ways does this discourse provide white Afrikaans-speaking students with a way in which to perceive themselves in terms of a particular relationship to the world and to others within the world? The logical purposes that discourses fulfil in particular contexts should, in effect, be identified. Ultimately, the objective will be to open up and shed light on a particular space, a level of meaning-making, operating in South African society, which could hopefully

help us to understand the context in which incidents of 'racism', perpetrated by the white Afrikaans-speaking, youth occur.

### 1.3 Research Design and Methodology

Subjects for the study comprised white Afrikaans-speaking subjects from the student population at Stellenbosch University (SU). For this purpose the students at SU were not only the most readily available, but served as interesting research subjects due to their current exposure to issues of transformation and language policies. Additionally, the objects of study were extended to texts as found in the media (the press, television, entertainment industry, particularly music) as well as to internet blogs and discussions. Recruiting subjects for this study was achieved by working my way through my own involvement in the Stellenbosch student network, thus making use of a snowball sampling method. This is a method by which each interviewee is asked to suggest additional people for interviewing (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 167). An attempt was made to include representatives from male, female and mixed residences, as well some private student wards.

Ethnographic fieldwork, of which observation and participant observation formed the core part, was conducted on the SU campus during the period of March 2008 to October 2009. This included the attendance of discussion groups, student conferences and political debates leading up to the 2009 South African general elections, most of which were organised by student bodies, like the Student Representative Council (SRC) and Student Affairs. Most of these meetings were aimed at providing an open forum for students at the University to raise concerns surrounding pressing issues, such as transformation and, especially, the language policy. In addition to these discussion opportunities, which were to an extent controlled and regulated, attention was also given to informal conversations and encounters taking place between students in and around campus, and it was in this capacity that I acted as participant observer as opposed to mere observer. These observations were then supplemented with 25 interviews, ranging from prominent student leaders (including SRC members, political party youth leaders, leaders of Afrikaans organisations based at the University of Stellenbosch, like Adam Tas<sup>1</sup> and the ATKV<sup>2</sup> youth branch) to other students, all of whom were white and Afrikaans-speaking.

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Tas: A student organisation who have as their goal to promote Afrikaans at Stellenbosch University

Many of the discussion forums generated a space where contrasting views and interests regarding transformation and language policy were given the opportunity to arise. This often culminated in a situation where the views of white Afrikaans-speaking students were played off against the views of non-Afrikaans-speaking black students. Observing behaviour and interaction, other than individual interviews, provided insight to the way racial discourse is generated within the context of interaction. Asking interviewees to reflect on these discussion events afterwards, however, also proved very useful as this provided the opportunity for comparing what was said during interviews with what people were observed to say (or refrained from saying) during the discussion opportunities. This allowed the potential to identify certain issues that subjects were too afraid to raise when in the presence of their peers for fear of reproach. The identification of such issues or 'taboo topics' indeed shed light onto the dynamics of racial discourse.

During the interviews, the strategy of probing, i.e. picking up on remarks that might point to racialised thought patterns, and pursuing it by getting the participants to clarify their views, proved fundamental. Delving deeper into the significance of remarks perceived by informants to be mundane or everyday, exposed some underlying structures and forces pertaining to a racialised world view.

With reference to Blommaert's (2005) stated relation between discourse and identity, the 'centring institutions' toward which such discourses are oriented had to be identified, as well as the role these frameworks fulfil in situating its adherents within the world – i.e. in what ways does this discourse provide them with a way in which to perceive themselves in terms of a particular relationship to the world and to others within the world?

## 1.4 Chapter Outline

In Chapter Two the theoretical, historical and social concepts used within the scope of this research will be discussed, by drawing on various literature that shed light onto these concepts' historical background and theoretical debates. The chapter sketches the historical background and context of the development of Afrikaner identity, as well as that of Stellenbosch University and the current dilemmas facing this institution and its students,

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<sup>2</sup> ATKV: Abbreviation for *Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereniging*, translated as 'Afrikaans Language and Culture Organisation', an organisation aimed at the promotion of Afrikaans culture.

brought about by the country's current socio-historic locatedness. This will be followed by an attempt to clarify the use of the concepts 'white', 'Afrikaners', and 'youth' within the scope of this thesis, as well as a theoretical discussion of 'race' and 'racial discourse' by focusing on the historical context of the 'race' concept's development. The literature that was chosen for its relevance to this research in terms of methodology used and issues focused on, will be discussed. The chapter concludes with a theoretical discussion on discourse – on how debates and insights circulating in the field of discourse, as well as the concepts with which it works, is useful for this research.

In Chapter Three the actual discourse as found during fieldwork will be discussed, where the fieldwork findings will be set out in each section. These will be cited in support for, and as illustration of, the tendencies that were picked up with regards to racial discourse among white Afrikaans-speaking students. The cognitive framework that these students carry with them into the university environment will be discussed, followed by a summary of the current context at SU, with regards to language debate and transformation, that presents the challenges within which white Afrikaans-speaking students' responses are located. Next, our attention will turn to the subjects' utilisation of the notions of 'culture' and 'ethnic identity' in negotiating their position and making sense of their experience in the context they find themselves in. Thereafter, it will be argued that discourse among these students has taken on an adaptive shape in response to the challenges mentioned earlier. Ending this chapter, the macrostructure within which this discourse should be considered, will be discussed, with closer focus to the influence of narratives and tendencies circulating in the print media, and how these often provide the frameworks shaping white Afrikaans-speaking racial discourse in South Africa. Lastly, Chapter Four discusses the methodological implications of embarking on such a study, providing some reflexive insights on the fieldwork encounter, before concluding with the general insights gained from the research.



## **Chapter 2: Background: Theoretical, Contextual and Conceptual**

The concepts 'Afrikaner', 'Afrikaans-speaking white youth', 'race', and 'racial discourse', form the basis of this study and therefore require conceptual clarification. These are all notions and categories that provoke interest in contemporary South Africa and some historical and contemporary background will be sketched in order to illustrate why this is the case. Ultimately, it is critical that a focus on why discourse is such a useful tool in investigating the dynamics surrounding these categories and concepts, is addressed.

### **2.1 Historical background**

Racial difference has played an important part in South Africa since the arrival of the Europeans. Later, during the early twentieth century Christian Afrikaner Nationalist project, this differentiation gained a particular uniqueness (Vestergaard, 2001: 20). This movement culminated into the National Party victory in 1948 that brought about segregationist policies, constituting the now famous apartheid regime in which non-white people were economically and politically disadvantaged. After the demise of this system that sought to secure whites' material advantage and political power (Davies, 2004: 2), Afrikaners experienced loss of political power into the hands of a ruling black majority. Most detrimental to Afrikaner identity, however, was the fact that where the Christian Nationalist movement that previously defined it no longer had the power to do so, the category 'Afrikaner' became open to negotiation and uncertainty (Vestergaard, 2001: 22). At the time of writing this thesis, fifteen years into the democracy, the Afrikaans-speaking white community finds itself in a most peculiar position, where loss of power is accompanied by some Afrikaners' interpretation of various experiences as direct onslaughts on the Afrikaner community. This perception is related to decreased support for Afrikaans, a high crime rate perceived by many as targeting whites, and a black-led government experienced by many Afrikaners not only as inept, but also as intentionally marginalising white Afrikaans-speakers.

A lot of these dynamics play themselves out at the previously white and mostly Afrikaans medium University of Stellenbosch, where recent policies imposed by the ANC-led government required universities to be made more accessible to the non-white sector of society that was excluded from such universities under apartheid rule.

The University of Stellenbosch is recognized as one of the four top research universities in South Africa. In 2009 more than 26 000 students enrolled, of whom white students constituted 67.6% and roughly 56% cited Afrikaans as their home language. The university places a high value on the experience of being a *Matie*, the name by which Stellenbosch students are known. SU is striving to achieve a more demographically representative student and staff population, with the aim that the demographic profile of its population not remain a reflection of the apartheid past. Under the link 'language of tuition' on the official website of the university, instead of finding a simple laid out language policy, a whole repertoire of official documents are presented, ranging from recommendations, findings, reports, official policy, to the task group appointed to facilitate the language policy review process (Stellenbosch University, 2009). This lay-out illustrates the complexity surrounding the language policy, in which it is attempted to reconcile a need for the preservation of Afrikaans with an increased use of English in tuition in the name of greater accessibility and international standards. This 'downscaling' in the use of Afrikaans, as well as the process of adjusting the overall institutional culture of the university that still resembles a white Afrikaans cultural character to accommodate more black students, is a site of great debate and contestation. As these dynamics are interpreted by white Afrikaans-speakers as part of a larger perceived onslaught on everything associated with Afrikaner identity, SU serves as a particularly interesting site for studying racial discourse among white Afrikaans-speaking students or youth.

## 2.2 Conceptualising 'White Afrikaans-speaking Youth'

The term 'Afrikaner' has appeared to be quite problematic as definitions of what exactly an Afrikaner is supposed to entail, vary. Among the informants interviewed, some retained the conventional apartheid definition of 'Afrikaner' designating white Afrikaans-language speakers with Dutch-speaking forefathers who fought in the Anglo Boer War, some included adherence to Christian values as an important criterion, while others included non-white Afrikaans-speakers like Afrikaans-speaking coloureds, and there were even those of the opinion that 'Afrikaner' should refer to people with their ethnic 'origins' in Africa, i.e. black African, and therefore did not consider themselves Afrikaners. From this it is clear that the term 'Afrikaner' is generally problematic, as some maintain the conventional apartheid definitions while others aspire to move away from it. Due to the race-based connotation of

the term 'Afrikaner', the clumsy word 'Afrikaanses' has come up as a term to designate Afrikaans-speakers. Media coverage on the De la Rey song further brought the term Afrikaner (along with its conventional race-based meaning) back into the vocabulary, almost boycotting further attempts for non-white Afrikaans-speakers to include themselves in the Afrikaner social category. Although for this reason I try to refrain from using the term Afrikaner as a social category, the extent to which it forms part of many of the subjects' self definition cannot be ignored, and will thus occasionally surface in this study. For the most part, however, 'white Afrikaans-speaking youth' will be used.

Use of the category 'youth' stems from the fact that this research is mainly focused on the reactions of the younger generation responding to a perception of a burden of the past being imposed on them: a past in which they may feel they had no stake. It is particularly the category of people under the age of 30 years that have been referred to as the 'De la Rey generation' and that will be categorised under 'youth' for the purpose of the study (Barnard, 2007: 4). The term 'white' merely points to the subjective importance accorded to the 'racial' in subjects' identification and orientation. Indeed, uncritical acceptance of white as an analytical category will have grave implications, as the theoretical discussion on the term race will illustrate in the next section.

### 2.3 'Race' and Racial Discourse

'Race' along with other 'identity markers', like gender and class, act as principles of distinction informing us how we should relate to one another and affecting the way we explain and experience the world (Hartigan, 1999: 186). 'Race', however, is more a social category than a physiological one. Human groups might differ in appearance, but it is in fact the social meaning attributed to this perceived difference that the dynamics surrounding 'race' are more concerned with, or as Anderson (2008: 157) notes: '...racism entails not a response, but an *appeal*, to difference'. During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when European colonialists were to a greater extent than before confronted with diverse groupings, the concept 'race' with its attendant associations of biological inferiority was developed in order to generate a neat, simple map of society (Guillaamin, 1999: 41). It was further developed as a means of subjugating people who were perceived as different. This need to subjugate was a defensive reaction by Europeans when they were confronted with 'difference', a disconcerting experience creating a need to secure their own material

advantage, hence the claim that racism was born out of capitalist interests (Banton, 1988: 43). Racist discourse ultimately entails that group differences which are social in nature are explained in terms of biological differences, e.g. socio-economic differences are ascribed to inherent characteristics (Solomos, 1999: 69). This conceptualisation is what has become known as the 'race paradigm' (Boonzaier, 1988).

Since the 1950s, however, scientists have started to move away from utilising 'race' as an analytic category. It is now only researched in its capacity as a socially constructed concept, through investigation of the meaning that the public attributes to it (Miles and Torres, 1999: 20). The public has, indeed, not moved along with academics in realising the social constructedness of 'race' (Boonzaier, 1988: 63; Shanklin, 1999: 671) with the result that discrimination based on skin colour is still prevalent. The most deeply ingrained way in which the 'race paradigm' persists in society is through an institutionally informed discourse which Fanon has identified as placing the black man and all that is associated with him in an inferior position (Fanon, 1970: 30; Shanklin, 1999: 674).

Historical racial discrimination across the globe, but especially in South Africa, resulted in structural inequalities between the white and non-white sectors of the population often reflected in various institutional cultures, to such an extent that our everyday dealings are informed by structures answering to white interests, without our being conscious of it. Decisions are made within this structural framework and unless deliberate attention is given to answering to the interests of particularly the non-white sector, outcomes will inevitably lean toward advancing whites. This is in all probability the motivation behind the development since the 1960s, to equate race blindness with racism (Van den Berghe, 1996: 1056), as proceeding as if race does not exist also implies not noticing inequalities associated with race. This amounts to the definition of racism as a structural problem characterising institutions, instead of an attitude problem (prejudice) characterised by individuals (Wellman, 1977: 8). Consequently, an institution is regarded as racist if its endeavours result in unequal outcomes with regards to different racial groups, in spite of the intentions and beliefs involved. As summarised by Van den Berghe: '[r]acism no longer means paying attention to race distinctions, but ignoring them' (1996: 1056).

This is then the background for my interpretations, a set of assumptions enabling me to identify cases where race blindness manifest, and to categorise such instances as adhering to the set of structures that keep racial inequalities in place. I went out into the field with an ‘academically informed opinion’ of what racism is, whereas the everyday person on the street is not necessarily consciously aware of these structural implications of being blind toward racial difference. Attention was thus given to how subjects value their own utterances, influenced by a conception of ‘racism’ informed by hearsay, media influence and personal experience (with the exception of those who have had some training in, or exposure to, social sciences) in stead of narrowly judging such utterances in terms of its unintended structural effects. Responses were, for instance, often framed so as to adhere to an ideology of individual rights – equality, democracy, human rights of individual citizens: ‘we should all be treated equally; the colour of one’s skin should not matter’. Understanding what counts as unacceptable and taboo from the point of view of the subject, will then assist in better contextualising their utterances.

Van Dijk (1987), in his analysis of racial and ethnic prejudice in thought and talk among citizens of the Netherlands, adopts a rigorous discourse analytic approach, a methodology taking a fairly systematic, quantitative-like approach to deciphering speech acts. In the process, the phenomenon of prejudiced discourse is represented in the form of sets of utterances which are categorised with the help of discourse analysis terminology. Even though such a method is insufficient to a social anthropological approach aiming to catch broader complexities surrounding racialised discourse, Van Dijk’s study does provide some useful constructs in terms of which racialised discourse can be identified and analysed, enabling one to conceptualise the phenomenon of racial discourse.

Positive self-presentation, coupled with negative other-representation (Van Dijk, 1987: 61) as well as impression management (1987: 287), are for instance strategies identified as playing a rather substantial role within the dynamics of racial discourse. Presenting the self as positive, means that there has to be an other who can be presented as negative. Negative other presentation, however, should not occur in such a manner as to give the impression of the speaker as prejudiced. Attempts are thus made to base negative other presentation on defensible premises, for instance ‘shared belief, rules, laws, principles, norms, or values, and ...demonstrably true ‘facts’’ (Van Dijk, 1987: 76). Particularly during my field research, it

became apparent that subjects were intensively aware of the negative valuations accorded to 'racism' in South Africa currently, which means that discussions and interviews were characterised by caution of stepping into the racist pot-holes. It is for the same reason, presumably, that subjects seemed to continually try and steer away from the race subject, leading to the possible topics for conversation being restricted in order to maintain a positive self-presentation in the light of the research questions. Van Dijk (1987: 61) noted that citing cultural differences as a reason for conflict also served as a strategy of positive self-presentation, as it frames racial intolerance in a manner more socially acceptable and understandable. Ultimately, during the research, where remarks were made that could possibly be interpreted as racist, great care was taken by subjects to control for the possibility of racist interpretations.

Another useful construct from Van Dijk's (1987: 48) work is that of the 'macrostructure' which points to the overall theme of a conversation. Cognitive macrostructures in particular, allude to attempts by subjects at keeping a conversation meaningfully coherent by contributing a consistent theme to it (1987: 49). Presenting what is being said in the form of a narrative serves as an effective way of handling complex information. The frequency of occurrence of certain topics can then provide more insight into the narrative structure that the participant(s) is/are trying to sustain. This is one of the key strategies through which subjects manage to imprint their own agendas on interviews and group discussions, by steering the conversation to the point where it adheres to a narrative structure which is often a reflection of their own interests or framework.

One of the factors influencing such a macrostructure that will be discussed in this thesis is indeed, the media. By analysing and identifying the macrostructures manifested by news reporting, in this case particularly that of Afrikaans newspapers, the claims to objective or neutral reporting can be evaluated in light of the overall effect the reporting produces, contributing to a narrative along the lines of which subjects then direct their own narratives. Van Dijk (1987: 161) himself points to the tendency of the media to claim to be neutral as they 'merely report incidents', whereas the bias in actual fact comes through their selection of events to report on, usually, a selection of stories confirming their readers' already established fears and assumptions. In this way, news reporting can contribute to the overall

narrative structure characterising people's conversations and thoughts (Van Dijk, 1987: 161).

Although not divorced from the broader context, Van Dijk's study is centred quite specifically on systematic analysis of speech acts in order to identify the prejudiced elements in discourse. The constructs of impression management and macrostructures provide some useful tools with which to delineate more clearly what should be included under racial discourse. Unlike Van Dijk's systematic analysis, however, the focus of my study will be less narrowly focused on identifying prejudiced elements in discourse and more on how received frameworks of race-based sense-making (both history, peers, family and media) are appropriated by white Afrikaans-speaking young people in the current South African context. In stead of focusing merely on what is being said through speech, it will be considered in conjunction with a plethora of other dynamics, among others, of what is not being said, and what is being said through media other than speech. All these elements taken together into a complex phenomenon is then what constitutes the 'racial discourse' mentioned in the title.

Lewis' study (2004), however, brings us closer to how racial discourse is being conceptualised in this research. The mere use of the concept of 'race', she claims, does not serve so much to express 'natural differences' as it is in fact to reproduce such differences (Lewis, 2004: 629). Race is in effect being produced within racialised interaction. In reproducing racial difference in this way we construct meaning for ourselves which assists us in our self-understanding and interactions with others (Lewis, 2004: 629), in effect serving as a role determinant. The racial framework, however, goes further so as to shape our institutional practices and access to material resources and it is in this respect that whiteness becomes a resource (Lewis, 2004: 628).

## **2.2 Previous studies on racial discourse**

Of the available studies on racial discourse that were chosen for their relevance to this research, nine focus on racial discourse in the South African context, four of which focus more specifically on South African whites (Steyn, 2004 & 2001; Puttergill 2006; Steyn & Foster, 2008), and one of which focuses exclusively on Afrikaners (Steyn, 2004). Research on racial discourse done at universities in the United States (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004) served as

useful comparative and theoretical background to the South African situation. Although there are numerous studies done among students at historically white universities in South Africa, particularly three of these were studied more closely with regards to their relevance to my own research (Mabokela, 2000; Walker, 2005; McKinney, 2007). Research methods employed in these studies range from classroom-based research (McKinney, 2007), in-depth interviews with black and white students (Walker, 2005) and survey questionnaires at the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University respectively (Mabokela, 2000).

Through narrative inquiry, Walker (2005) discovers among white students what she deems 'default identities', truths taken as self-evident, informing frameworks of meaning that enable and constrain what can be said and not said (Walker, 2005: 134). The underlying tendency here is ultimately that white students refrain from critically reflecting on their privileged position (Walker, 2005: 131). McKinney's (2007) research, gained from racial discourse as manifested in a classroom setup, links to this, as she found that discourse constitutes a way of organising meaning, presenting classroom students in her study with particular meaningful constructs with the help of which they make sense of experience, consequently limiting the constructs that they have at their disposal when they speak. Essentialist ways of speaking about race and culture constitute meanings brought over from the past and many of her subjects illustrated an inability to move past this way of generating meaning (McKinney, 2007: 216).

Both Mabokela (2000) and Walker (2005) focused on the institutional discourse at historically white universities. Mabokela points to the tendency at historically white universities, echoed by black students' reported experience, to assimilate black students into an already existent institutional structure instead of changing that structure to accommodate the students. This, he says, is problematic since black students will soon constitute the majority of the student body at these universities (Mabokela, 2000: 77). A particular point of agreement between the studies of Walker and Mabokela, moreover, is the finding that vast differences exist with regards to perspectives among black and white students, as illustrated through their respective narratives. Different meanings are attributed to the past, where black students choose to regard what happened during apartheid as an important reminder of the work that still needs to be done, whereas white students regard the apartheid past as irrelevant to their current identities and refer to it as



something that should be put behind in order to move on (Walker, 2005: 130). Another stark difference between black and white students are their perceptions as to the extent of racism on campus where for instance black students report higher incidence of racial tension at SU than white students (Mabokela, 2000: 70).

Also interesting was to consider, for the sake of comparison, a similar study conducted among students at three United States Universities, the goal of which was to identify dominant racial stories by means of in-depth interviews (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004). As a point of departure, the authors claim that where people from different contexts and positions in society all employ similar narratives in their responses, it points to the taken-for-grantedness of certain sets of assumptions, and thus the dominance of a certain ideology, constituting readily available and easily employable 'stories' (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004: 556). Narratives identified by Bonilla-Silva et al (2004: 569) all showed similarity in structure, were generated in response to the same questions (making it 'predictable' to some extent), and all fulfilled the same functions, ideologically (defending privileged position) and rhetorically (e.g. positive self presentation).

As with this research, Bonilla-Silva et al's study did not have as its goal to identify racists or to determine the level of racism, but to signify that there is a specified discourse, or 'a set of racial stories' (2004: 575) generating a certain representation of how the racial world is 'supposed' to work (2004: 561), thus controlling for a certain representation of society. Bearing in mind that white subjects often deal selectively with data, e.g. citing exceptional cases as a general tendency, or underscoring the extent to which racial discrimination still prevails, one could easily suggest that whites fabricate stories in order to answer to their own interests. However, since the ideologies we adhere to influence, to a great extent, how we experience the world, such stories are not experienced by white subjects as fiction or exaggerations, but as 'real'. People sharing a representational community circulate such stories among each other, clarifying, rationalising and emphasising its 'logic' and in the process reinforce the 'of course-ness' of such claims (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004: 577).

A scholar who has made a substantive contribution to 'whiteness studies', by means of discourse analysis in South Africa, is Melissa Steyn (Steyn, 2001 & 2004; Steyn and Foster, 2008). Her 2001 study was based on survey questionnaires in which white subjects were

probed to reflect on their whiteness. The findings reflect a discourse of white South Africans coming to terms with a situation where whiteness no longer guarantees material and social privilege. South Africans, and not necessarily only whites, are in the process of unlearning previous assumptions and frameworks (Steyn, 2001: xxiii), forming part of the larger process of 'decolonising the imagination' (2001: xxviii). South African citizens are thus currently engaging in a renegotiation of identity (Steyn, 2001: 155). Apart from this process being complicated by the constraints that available repertoires of discourses present (Steyn, 2001: 41), a further obstacle is the ambivalence of South African whites' experience, namely that what is being known as politically correct is being experienced as alienating and to their disadvantage, resulting in a situation where white South Africans feel 'morally convinced, but personally unaccomplished' (Steyn, 2001: 119).

Also of relevance is Steyn's research in which she employed a methodology of analysing media content as published in South African newspapers (Steyn, 2004; Steyn & Foster, 2008). Both of these identify 'white talk' as the discourse employed by white South Africans as a means of coming to terms with their current role. In analysing letters to the editor published in an Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, it is established that among Afrikaners such white talk takes on a specific form, centred around the Afrikaners' engagement in defining and expressing their cultural identity (Steyn, 2004: 149). Afrikaners then feel a need to preserve the self-image that was built during the apartheid era by reinscribing the mythology that informed this identity-building process within current social life 'so that the ground gained through the apartheid era of systematic Afrikaner advancement is not lost in the new social order' (Steyn, 2004: 150). This need to hold steadfast to an Afrikaner mythology, or to establish continuity with the past, is especially understandable considering that the ideology informing Afrikaner socialisation has become the 'other' of post apartheid South Africa (2004: 154), changing status from something that was aspired to to something that is now shunned, leaving Afrikaners feeling alienated.

By analysing two weekly columns in a South African newspaper, Steyn and Foster (2008) point out how 'white talk' contains both 'old' elements from apartheid South Africa and elements characteristic of a 'new racism' (Steyn and Foster, 2008: 46). Ways in which the 'old' ideological underpinnings are adapted to a new environment has to do with the high value attributed to principles like transformation, non-racism and democracy in current-day

South Africa. One of the biggest challenges this new discourse aims to account for is the fact that there is now an alternative claim to how the world should work: a (non-white) voice that can 'talk back'. It is in the face of the latter that the need has arisen for white privilege to be defended, in stead of accepting it as a given (Steyn and Foster, 2008: 46).

Another study based on textual analysis is that of Ansell (2004) in which 154 written submissions leading up to the 2001 South African National Conference on Racism in Durban were analysed. These texts were compared in order to determine how the various subjects who made these written contributions understand and define 'racism'. The phrase 'two nations of discourse' is being used to refer to the difference in how black and white South Africans approach questions related to racism. Ansell (2004: 6) distinguishes between an attitudinal model and a structural model in approaching racism. Analysing racism in terms of individual racist attitudes leads one to handle 'racism' as a static concept of which the scale of its presence can be determined. The structural model on the other hand focuses on the continuous process in which racial ideologies interact with ever-changing social circumstances, thus acknowledging racial ideology as a dynamic phenomenon (Ansell, 2004: 6). In this regard white South Africans, 'even the extreme Afrikaner right-wing', have moved away from white supremacist discourse and instead adopted a rhetoric emphasising the 'multicultural right to protect and defend its (white) culture in a multi-racial democracy' (Ansell, 2004: 22), thereby adapting their racial ideologies to current-day circumstances.

Another tendency is identified, claiming that black subjects prefer to adhere to a structural definition of racism alluding to the economic component where 'racism' always presupposes subjugation and where, as a result, only the economically powerful can perpetrate racism (Ansell, 2004: 12). Subjects identifying as white, on the other hand, seem to prefer a more idealistic approach to racism 'based on moral principles of human sameness' (Ansell, 2004: 12). These presuppositions result from black and white subjects' differential socio-economic and historical positions in South Africa.

Collier's (2005) use of focus group discussions in investigating racial discourse provided the opportunity to observe how meaning, identifications and relationships are generated through interaction. For instance, characterisations, assumptions or generalisations expressed through utterances, provide listeners with the opportunity to confirm or

challenge said claims (Collier, 2005: 307). In this way meaning is negotiated, reinforced and confirmed through conversation, manifested for instance in the process by which white subjects reach the unwritten agreement of avoiding racial terms (2005: 310), using 'them' and 'they' as 'indexical referents' to their black counterparts (2005: 306).

Lastly, Puttergill conducted in-depth interviews with white residents from the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. It was interesting here to note how subjects made use of various rhetorical strategies with the goal of presenting themselves in a favourable light, whereas such utterances in actual fact exposed their lingering prejudices, with the unintentional effect of reinforcing them. Many, for instance, cited cultural clashes as a reason why they disapproved of non-whites moving into previously white residential areas (Puttergill, 2006: 131). Puttergill notes on this point how the notion of fixed difference is maintained through the discourse of irreconcilable 'cultural difference', while simultaneously deflecting attention away from 'race' (2006: 133). Further, where 'they' (non-whites) were observed by informants to satisfactorily assimilate in the white residential area, efforts were made to place emphasis on such an observation, e.g. pointing them out as well-behaved and well-dressed, yet in so doing certain lingering expectations informed by generations of prejudice were brought to the fore. Ultimately, attempts by interviewees at emphasising non-racist attitudes were often followed by utterances confirming such attitudes in a masked form, culminating into a discourse characterised by denial of racial prejudice which in effect reinforces racial prejudice. The most important insight taken from Puttergill was, however, that interviewees' rendering of things that happen around them constitutes a particular interpretation of such observations. The discourses employed did not constitute a reflection of reality but a representation of reality that resonated with the picture informants held of themselves and the world (Puttergill, 2006: 141).

The overall usefulness and relevance of these studies to my own research, lies mainly in their use of narratives as their units of analysis, as within discourse, narratives are identified that point to a certain way of perceiving and making sense of the world, racially. These studies point out that when it comes to our racial thought patterns, there are restrictions brought about by socio-historic forces. Our discourse then takes the form of established narratives that are readily employable. These narratives, through interactional reinforcement, are experienced as real (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004: 577). Ways in which white

racial discourse has adapted to post-apartheid South Africa can, for instance, be seen in that prejudiced frameworks that still linger are masked in non-racial language (Puttergill, 2006: 133), but also that there seems to be a shift from white supremacism towards claims to recognition in a multi-racial society. This has to do with how racial discourses are negotiated in the current South African situation, where white citizens are faced with an interactional context where counterclaims to a homogeneous white discourse are presented (Steyn and Foster, 2008: 46). However, the literature shows us that despite these negotiation processes vast differences between white and black students' narratives on the racial situation in the country still prevail (Ansell, 2004; Mabokela, 2000).

### 2.3 Discourse and Anthropology

Discourse is the framework within which any type of meaning transfer takes place and is what makes our environment socially and culturally meaningful (Blommaert, 2005: 4). Discourse transcends language to include 'language in action' (2005: 2), i.e. language as manifested not merely in speech and conversations, but in all forms of human symbolic activity (2005: 3). 'Discourse analysis' can refer to any textual or contextual investigation of discourse (Matsuki, 1996: 351). Within the context of linguistics, closer focus is attributed to linguistic forms within a particular text, constituting a more micro-level approach. In contrast to this, the anthropological approach entails that discourse is analysed to see what it can tell about culture at large, thus is more focused on macrohistorical processes (Lindstrom, 1996: 162; Matsuki, 1996: 351). Such an approach operates from the assumption that language serves as reproduction of a certain worldview, through reproducing both shared cultural identity (sameness) and social difference (DeBernardi, 1994: 861). A key intellectual in the area of the macrohistorical approach to discourse was Michel Foucault whose work focuses on the links between knowledge, communication and power (Lindstrom, 1996: 163; Foucault, 1972).

Three main areas with regards to the anthropological approach to discourse analysis can be identified. First is the ethnography of communication pioneered by Hymes (1964) which focuses on language use as opposed to language structure, thus constituting a much more practice orientated approach than structural linguistics. Hyme's ethnographic focus helped in establishing the linking of speech events with their broader sociocultural context (Matsuki, 1996: 352-353; DeBernardi, 1994: 866).

Second is conversational analysis which looks at how meaning is intersubjectively constructed within the interactional context. It focuses on micro-phenomena by means of carefully transcribed texts. Through this approach scholars found that no discourse exists independently of subjects who are in conversation with each other. Discourse is thus dialogical and serves as the arena where meaning is negotiated. In this sense, discourse is also dynamic as it is open for continual change and development (Matsuki, 1996: 353). As discourse accounts for the dynamic element in human meaning-making, it has been proposed by anthropologists that the term 'discourse' be used as an alternative for 'culture', as 'culture' tends to more easily land on the slippery slope toward essentialist interpretation (Lindstrom, 1996: 163).

The last approach identified is ethnopoetics. Linguistically more detailed, it regards language and its use as essentially artistic, or as Friedrich (1986: 17) states it: 'inherently, pervasively and powerfully poetic'. Within ethnopoetics it is claimed that even though the speaker's imagination is constrained by language structure, individuals still have at their disposal the innovative ability to creatively appropriate such constraining materials to their own needs (DeBernardi, 1994: 870). Other contributors in this area were Hymes (1981) and Tedlock (1983) who focussed attention to the verbal artistry of oral discourse (Matsuki, 1996: 354).

Discourse informs our experience by providing us with taken-for-granted truths and thus shapes our perception of reality (Rapport and Overing, 2000: 121). Some of Blommaert's critiques against the formal methodology of critical discourse analysis, are its use of rigorous linguistic categories for analysing discourse (2005: 23), as well as its assumption of stable patterns of power relations which is often projected onto discourse (2005: 32). Moreover, according to Bourdieu (cited in Thompson, 1991: 2-4), what is often neglected is that the analyst himself takes part in the social and political conditions of language formulation and use, which impedes his ability to grasp these conditions. In studying discourse, the importance of observation as opposed to merely conducting interviews is therefore justified, in that a comprehensive discourse analysis needs to take into consideration a plethora of contextual indicators. These include the position of the speaker, the broader ideology toward which a speaker or actor's conduct is directed ('centring institutions'), the interests being served (discourse does not merely say something, but does something), etc., all of which will be discussed below.

Context is probably the most important concept when analysing discourse. No fragment of discourse is meaningful in itself and only becomes meaningful when considered against the background of the broader context in which it is produced (and consequently reproduced) (Blommaert, 2005: 3). In this regard, Blommaert (2005: 11) distinguishes between 'referential or denotational meaning', that to which an utterance objectively and literally refers to, and 'indexical meaning', the implicit meaning of which the context is needed in order for it to be grasped. Such indexical meaning, for instance, entails the value attributed to the idea being communicated, and the successful transfer of such meaning relies on, and operates from, the assumption of shared meaning between speaker and listener. In connection with this, DeBernardi (1994: 864) also notes that in order for communication to take place, our world of experience firstly needs to be simplified and generalised into a verbally conveyable form, and secondly, speakers must tacitly agree upon this shared classification of experience. The more immediately visible contextual indicators needed to pick up on indexical meaning could include the speaker's demographic attributes (gender, age, ethnic association), the relationship between speaker and listener, the situation, or the goal of an utterance (confirming, reinforcing, negotiating or challenging social roles, group identity or a particular status quo) (Blommaert, 2005: 11-12). More invisible, often 'forgotten' contexts, however, could include the broader social, political and historical circumstances which serve as the conditions for the meaningful uptake of utterances and actions. Even this particular research on racial discourse is socio-historically situated, which means that there is a particular relevance in studying white racial discourse in the South African higher educational context at this moment in history, fifteen years after apartheid. The challenge facing the researcher is to be careful of taking such contexts for granted so as to be able to identify them as the conditions for meaning, and investigate how meaning is shaped by these.

The most important of these contextual givens is what Blommaert (2005: 75) terms 'centring institutions'. Every action and utterance is namely oriented toward a particular institutionalised framework or dogma, which means that the meanings that we generate all 'belong' somewhere. These centring institutions attribute certain central values to particular systems. People's actions and utterances are then oriented toward what they perceive as the central values of a particular system, and a process of 'centring' occurs, aligning the

meaning that one produces with a certain set of assumptions and predispositions. It is through this process that normative meaning, or a context which enables the immediate uptake of meaning among adherents, is generated (Blommaert, 2005: 75). Moreover, these centring institutions provide individuals with a subject position from which to speak so that the claims they make are grounded in a particular institution, instead of floating around meaninglessly. One of the implications of this notion is that the way we speak can become an 'inescapable signifier for belonging to a certain set of beliefs' (Rapport & Overing, 2000: 120), which means the way in which meanings are brought across are usually constrained by the centring institutions informing our discourse. In short, we don't always realise what we mean.

Various scholars have emphasised the extent to which discourse and language are instruments of power, with the result that identifying these power structures is critical to discourse analysis (Blommaert, 2005: 24-25; Bourdieu, cited in Thompson, 1991; Rapport & Overing, 2000). Bourdieu's (cited in Thompson, 1991: 5) insistence that there is no such thing as a neutral objective language structure, as seen in his critique of de Saussure's 'langue' and Chomsky's 'competence', is based on the fact that these notions neglect the socio-political conditions in which a language is 'created'. Language as used by a certain group is imposed onto everyone else as the standard form with the help of the socio-historic conditions that provided them with the power to do so. Furthermore, as stated by Rapport and Overing (2000: 19), every single speech act is an implicit manifestation of power, as discourse serves to shape the world to our liking. Linguistic competence entails that speakers impose their own perception of the world onto others, with the aim of getting listeners to confirm this worldview. This means that one is practicing the power to impose values of one's own choosing onto others, generating an environment where one's own interests, in alignment with particular institutional interests, prevail.

Lastly, on the point of power, the context in which utterances are received are never neutral, as some role-players have more power to determine the context in which utterances and actions will be interpreted (Blommaert, 2005: 45). The variation of meaning across the world, for instance, relies on how ideas and discourses are differently received and valued, according to who has the power to decide how it will be received at that particular place and time. The key point underlying the focus on power and centring



institutions in discourse is that utterances and actions should be considered structurally, not as single instances of communication. With regards to the socio-historic conditions in which discourses became meaningful during its initial inception, power has always had a role to play. Ultimately, discourse is a very strong instrument of power, as it enables a situation where those subjected can be complicit in the reproduction of that power (Bourdieu, cited in Thompson, 1991: 23).

What follows is an attempt at illustrating that discourse and identity are closely interrelated. Identity is not inherent, fixed or given, but is generated, negotiated and constructed within the context of interaction. Identity is in fact identification, a process of which recognition by others forms a prerequisite (Blommaert, 2005: 205). How the individual views himself, how he thinks the other views him, as well as assumptions of how participants in interaction are supposed to view each other, are all pre-inscribed in interaction (Blommaert, 2005: 206). These identity resources which are utilised in interaction, furthermore comprise 'a whole *repertoire* of identity features converted into complex and subtle moment-to-moment speaking positions' (2005: 232) which means this pretext informing our interaction is complex and elaborate. On the other hand, interaction itself provides the opportunity for such assumptions and predispositions to be either reinforced or challenged. Identity thus informs discourse, yet is simultaneously both challenged and reinforced through discourse. In adapting discursive structures to our unique personal circumstances through interpretation work, we are constructively contributing to discourse instead of merely reproducing it. Rapport and Overing (2000: 121) sums up the two-edged role of discourse, namely that it limits and traps us within certain systems of knowledge or thought on the one hand, yet on the other hand is what allows us to talk from a subject position. In this way discourse provides the sources for each person's identity, and consequently is what makes us human (Rapport and Overing, 2000: 121).

In order to get a full grasp on the contextual givens of this discourse being studied, a researcher would need to have insight into the socio-historical background of white Afrikaans-speaking students, as well as that of the university. Also important would be to take heed of the current events around Afrikaner identity, language, transformation and other post-apartheid political dynamics in order to contextualise what this discourse constitutes a reaction to. Various personal attributes of the researcher, for instance being

white, Afrikaans-speaking and a student, assisted me in picking up on participants' indexical meaning. The question can however be taken further as to which centring institutions are we both, researcher and researched, adhering to that enables us to immediately relate to meanings in dialogue? Also relevant is what does the position with which people align themselves say about their identities? Moreover, it seems that language can almost never be utilised neutrally, as power relations are already built into the language structure itself. The topic of 'race' especially, immediately evokes a whole plethora of power-related associations, especially in South Africa. If discourse is the space within which the negotiation of our view of the world and ourselves takes place, what type of worldview and self perception is being negotiated through white students' discourse, particularly when issues surrounding 'race' come to the fore? These are some of the questions that theoretical insights on discourse in the literature led me to.

Now that we have established the historical context of Afrikaners, youth and Stellenbosch University, and elaborated on the theoretical background to race and discourse, we can turn to the fieldwork which provided the data in the context of which these concepts and ideas could be further investigated.

## **Chapter 3: Racial Discourses: Evidence from the Stellenbosch case study**

The habitual knowledge and assumptions that formed part of white Afrikaans-speaking students' experience has itself been shaped by generations of racial segregation. This knowledge has become problematic in a context where a historically white university has to comply with government-induced requirements for enlarging its racial diversity. Confronted with such an uncertain situation, white Afrikaans-speaking students seemed to have responded strategically with a complex range of reactions, all drawn from ideas, narratives and knowledge transmitted to them from various sources. These complex processes will be sketched, discussed and interpreted by drawing on examples from the fieldwork encounter.

### **3.1 Normalised assumptions**

There are various historical factors that need to be taken into account in order to understand the predispositions and assumptions from which white Afrikaans-speaking people in South Africa operate, as a group, as well as individuals, each facing their own unique circumstances. These include the propagation of white superiority during colonisation, the interpretation of this theme during apartheid Afrikaner identity construction, right through to the unique backgrounds that shape individual Afrikaners' experiences. Bourdieu's (1977) notion of the habitus is most useful in illustrating how the assumptions of a socio-historically informed system can be instilled in peoples' subconscious.

The habitus is a set of predispositions acquired through earlier experience and conditioning, which forms the basis of later experience and appreciation (Bourdieu, 1977: 78). The significance of a certain way of doing and thinking becomes part of the implicitly assumed everyday knowledge, so that the actual meaning of these customs is never explicitly enquired into, and subconsciously reproduced (1977: 79). In this way the habitus provides the limited range of options or resources people can utilise within their everyday dealings (Bourdieu, 1977: 77). The advantage of these predispositions is that they provide members of society with a subconscious awareness of a certain set of rules and norms, so that these

norms do not have to be stated explicitly, consequently enabling and regulating social interaction (1977: 80). The 'mythico-ritual oppositions' provided by the habitus (e.g. male-female, polluted-unpolluted) presents us with schemes for our perceptions, thoughts and actions, and even forms the basis for how we spatially relate to each other and our surroundings (Bourdieu, 1977: 89-90). These schemes are instilled during the socialisation process (1977: 90). Interactions should, ultimately, not be analysed in terms of an individual-to-individual relationship. The truth of an interactional encounter does not lie in the encounter itself, but should be considered structurally: the role-players in interaction are all representatives of certain sets of dispositions, the interactional encounter serving as the opportunity where these dispositions can be maintained, reinforced or challenged (1977: 81).

One of the important features shaping the experience of Afrikaans-speaking whites in South Africa, is the ideology propagating the assumed privileged status accorded to whiteness globally, thus an attempt at inquiring into this set of assumptions will follow. As an ideology underlying everyday experience, it functions subconsciously, selling narratives that will make people accept their stratified position in society, in effect blinding whites to the '...connection between their gain and others' loss' (Lewis, 2004: 633). It provides the deeply seated assumption that white identity is entitled to certain privileges, that these privileges deserve protection, and that what they have rightfully belongs to them (Lewis, 2004: 633). Illustrating how easily such an ideology can be maintained is Lewis' example of how, in the USA, racial stereotypes lead to lower value attribution to black residential areas. The result is a vicious cycle in which cultural schemes (racial stereotypes) can determine resource allocation, but at the same time these cultural schemes are backed by resources (Lewis, 2004: 631). Whiteness is furthermore normalised, neglecting that as whites, they have the power to determine what is 'normal' (2004, 634), leading to refraining from racialising the self. Becoming self-conscious as 'white', however, occurs during situations where interests are at stake (2004, 626). Useful here is Lewis' (2004: 627) distinction between a 'series', characterised by people who merely share traits, and a 'group', wherein shared traits become the incentive of collective mobilisation. When group consciousness becomes a prerequisite for achieving interests, collective identity becomes a resource. In this regard, whiteness constitutes a particularly powerful source of symbolic capital (2004, 628). Lewis

(2004, 637) further highlights the importance of observational research in studying whiteness, where questions can be asked as to how whites illustrate awareness of their whiteness, or what their whiteness enables them to say and do that they would otherwise not have been able to. Claims to colour-blindness can be uncovered, in that through observation it can be established that whites do in fact live racially, subconsciously using their white identity as a resource (2004: 638). In this regard observation is the most helpful tool in picking up on discrepancies between what is said and what is lived.

This research, however, involves itself not with whiteness per se, as in Afrikaans-speaking whites' own unique embodiment and interpretation of this global ideology, and how it is appropriated for their particular socio-historical circumstances. Fourie (2008) sheds some light onto the various elements characterising the particular 'social stock of knowledge' that was handed down to modern-day Afrikaners from apartheid. The reason for nationalism being so built into the Afrikaner consciousness can be considered in the light of the circumstances under which this need developed historically: fear of absorption into both English and black people (Van Jaarsveld, 1985: 19). The strong focus on the maintenance of a high moral standard of living, coupled with a deeply ingrained fear of moral degeneration (Fourie, 2008: 257) was built around perceptions of the survival of the white race in 'dark Africa' and the importance attributed to the apartheid Afrikaner identity construction process.

In a *Sunday Times* article of 1985, Owen mentioned that the gulf dividing South African society is so deep, that our inability to see across it leads to a situation where whites and blacks operate on illusions of each other in stead of basing their knowledge of each other on actual experience and engagement (Owen, 1985: 23). Even though South African society has come a long way since 1985 in its strife toward a more integrated democratic society, the deep rifts are still so prevalent that this comment made 24 years ago still holds for today. By comparing letters written to the editor in the Afrikaans newspaper, *Beeld*, written during 1990-92 with those written during 2004, Fourie (2008: 267) found evidence of a substantial decrease in racist remarks, indicating Afrikaners' awareness of what is considered unacceptable. However, underneath the visible evidence of Afrikaners adapting to their changing circumstances traces of the essence of the typification of the other remains visible in Afrikaner discourse (2008: 282). Illustrating the habitual nature of the Afrikaner social

stock of knowledge, as well as the challenges this holds for the researcher, Fourie (2008: 243) remarks:

‘In the South African context one can argue that the average white Afrikaans-speaking child was born into a readily interpreted and organised South African reality. This ready-made reality would have been presented to the child by parents, family, teachers and other authoritarian figures as taken for granted and logical. In addition the child could fall back on a whole supply of ready-made interpretations (typifications) to interpret and confront his or her social reality. The task of the phenomenologist would be to question the taken-for-grantedness of this life-world and identify its underlying principles (or essences)’.

Probably the greatest challenge during fieldwork was identifying manifestations of this habitus in such a way as to be able to cite and explain concrete examples of it. I firstly attempted to identify implicit illustrations of assumptions about the ‘other’, also by inquiring into my own thoughts, as I am a white Afrikaans-speaking South African. An opportunity for introspection arose once while in conversation with a friend, I caught myself deliberating on why Kenyans do so well in athletic items such as steeple chase and long distance. I ascribed it to ‘their getting used to struggling over tree trunks and through rivers in order to reach school’. Without my noticing, I was falling into the pothole of patronising discourse. In turning to tropes most familiar to my frame of reference in terms of ‘Africa’, it was as if I regarded it as my duty to make sense of the phenomenon in terms of this easily sellable discourse. The truth is often that utterances elicit greater social acceptance if they are aligned with an already existing set of beliefs and assumptions. In what was said an archetypical image of Africans was unintentionally reinforced. This manner of speaking is indeed so common that we do not realise its patronising effect, reinforcing the ‘myth of the dark continent’ (Brantlinger, 1985) as well as the ‘othering’ of Africa. These assumptions that we hold about the ‘other’ come to the fore without our noticing or our intending it that way, through the dualism in terms of which we think: backward vs. advanced, rural vs. industrialised. This is illustrated by the following comment by a female student:

‘During my stay in res something that quite struck me was that of all the people who watched TV, it was mostly the black and coloured girls who watched TV. That was my

experience. They like always watch TV. Even when walking past in the middle of the night someone will be watching TV (laugh). I don't know if they don't watch TV at home, or don't have TVs. The one girl who lives here, she's from Sebokeng, somewhere to the North near Pretoria or something, I'm not sure whether it's a squatter camp or something, so then I think to myself: she's so intelligent, she's doing her M, and then I think, ten to one she doesn't have a TV.'

An interesting thing to note was that when asked to reflect on race-related experience at her residence, this was the incident that immediately came to mind, as if it could be most easily aligned with already existing frameworks. Her particular interpretation of what she observed – namely that coloured and black students watching more TV could possibly be attributed to their not having TVs at home, thus their poorer background – immediately points to an interpretation of the experience in terms of a certain framework informed by the socio-historic situation of South Africa. Further evidence of her thoughts being patterned by dualisms is her contrasting her black housemate's intelligence with the fact that she comes from a poor, rural background.

While reflecting on his school-related experience, a male student was probed as to whether, in his experience, the introduction of non-whites into a previously white school served to alter the school's culture to any extent.

'I think it depends on the type of learners that enter the school, in terms of different communities or cultures, where people come in from different cultures, who do not come from a white Afrikaans culture, are still well brought up and in the same Afrikaans-speaking culture as oneself. So you feel at ease, and I don't recall any race incidents during my time at school. And I must confess that one of my good friends who is a non-white spoke better Afrikaans than some Afrikaans people. It was as if he used more sophisticated Afrikaans words than me.'

Instances in this utterance that might be traced back to the habitual schemes characterising Afrikaner discourse could be read in the experiences he chooses to share, namely the fact that these learners are 'well brought up' even though they do not come from white Afrikaans-speaking backgrounds, as well as his 'confession' that he came into contact with a non-white who speaks better Afrikaans than him. It shows that he regarded these

experiences as meaningful, that he felt he could learn from it, and possibly even that I, the white Afrikaans-speaking interviewer, as well as the wider white Afrikaans-speaking community, could learn from it. What could ultimately be read in this utterance is that white Afrikaans expectations of the non-white 'other' are in fact contrary to what these experiences illustrate. Even though these illustrations have as their goal to emphasise the interviewee's high valuation of racial integration, it occurs within the language of higher versus lower expectations of whites and non-whites respectively.

Various students reflected on their experience of the residence situation where a spatial distance between white and non-white students is perceived to be the natural state of affairs that is automatically adhered to. One student mentioned how he did not particularly notice these divisions until reflecting on it after he left the residence:

'See, when I was there it was during my first three years at university. I was extremely naïve, so I did not watch out for things like that. But when I think back now, I mean, the dining hall was the finest example, I mean, the whites always had their tables and the coloureds had their tables, and that's how it was.'

One student made it particularly clear how his previous experience with physical distance between whites and coloureds in the community he grew up in, made it particularly difficult for him to adjust to integration-driven objectives at Stellenbosch university.

'Residence is quite all right now. Yes, everyone knows his place, and they know to what extent they can engage with me, and from there on they must just leave it, because, understand, you are from the same area as me, you know the circumstances in which we grew up. It's not like here, understand, I had to get used to coloureds in a nightclub, because at [the town I come from] it's not like that, and all those type of stuff that they share with you, bathroom, shower, all those stuff, to me that is... one has to adapt to that.'

Interesting here is how this student employs certain normalised ways of referring to non-whites (for instance using the generic 'they' or 'them') informed by a conservative small town background wherein contact with non-whites was limited to dealing with them in their capacity as subordinate labourers, whether farm workers, the gardener or the domestic



worker. His identification with me, the interviewer, as coming from a rural area near him, led him to conclude that my exposure to racial others while growing up must coincide with his, which eased in his employment of this discourse as he assumed I would be familiar with it. He expected of me, in considering the circumstances in which he was raised, to understand his unease with, and at times unwillingness to, share a space with non-whites. It is worth noting here that had I not shared this indexical order with the interviewee, the way he would have related his experiences to me might have been substantially different.

Many of these responses point, in an unaware and unintentional manner, to implicit built-in perceptions of a 'non-white other' that is more influenced by mythico-ritual oppositions than by experience, a framework influenced by the deeply divided South African social situation. After being asked to reflect on their experiences of race, issues focused on by students when reciting such experiences were channelled by a scheme-informed perception of the non-white (inferior) 'other'. Returning to Bourdieu's idea on how the perceptive schemes of our habitus dictate how we organise our surroundings spatially, it can be expected that strict segregation ideologies of the past have left their mark on how Afrikaans-speaking whites relate to their surroundings and fellow South Africans spatially. The taboo of whites and non-whites moving into each others' physical spaces and the resulting distance between them is still felt, maintained and reinforced in South African society, with the still deeply ingrained association of violations of these social boundaries with pollution. Hence spatial divisions between whites and non-whites are normalised.

### **3.2 Language debate and transformation**

SU has now, for the past few years, been the site of a heavily laden debate revolving around language. Being a historically Afrikaans-medium university, the introduction of double medium teaching in English and Afrikaans has been met with fierce resistance from pro-Afrikaans leaders, academics, students, as well as the public. The way the debate is played out in the media has especially contributed to the strong controversy and sensitivity associated with the topic. The main motivation behind systematically introducing English is to make the university more accessible to a wider spectrum of South African citizens who have limited or even no proficiency in the Afrikaans language, particularly black (e.g. Xhosa- and Zulu-speaking) students. Apart from easing the university's task in meeting the government-sanctioned introduction of black students into the university, it is also argued

that increased levels of English enable better adherence to international academic standards. The T-option, where the conducting of lectures maintains a 50/50 Afrikaans and English presence, has been introduced with the aim of promoting diversity and integration while maintaining an Afrikaans presence. A-optionists (those in favour of more Afrikaans), however, fear that the T-option will put the university on a slide toward Anglicisation with the result that Afrikaans will lose its role as the language of instruction at Stellenbosch, and ultimately, its academic functions in the larger South Africa. This is often backed by arguments that the Western Cape already has various English-medium universities, and this apprehension can be located within the larger fear and perception among the Afrikaans-speaking community that the ANC government is undermining the Afrikaans language due to its association with the previous apartheid regime.

As alluded to at the beginning of this study, SU aims to meet transformation and integration targets, something currently aspired to by higher education institutions in South Africa as a whole, but especially among historically white universities. Renewed attention was given to the issue of black and white student integration when a video surfaced in the media, during February 2008, that was created by four white Afrikaans-speaking residence students who mocked and showed their dissatisfaction with integration objectives at the University of the Free State. They apparently forced black cleaners in their residence to perform humiliating tasks which were videotaped. The result was, apart from public outcry and media debate, a renewed evaluation of transformation objectives, among others a committee appointed by the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, to investigate said issues, with the aim of making recommendations for improved integration strategies at South African tertiary institutions (South Africa, 2008). Needless to say, SU has had its own fair share of transformation-related challenges, exacerbated by the language panic, and it is within this context that student responses were considered and evaluated for the purpose of this research.

The attendance of a few open debates on campus revolving around the issues of race, transformation and language policy helped in placing individual responses from white Afrikaans-speakers into context. A growing awareness of the historically white institutional culture that serves to exclude them is being vocalised with increasing vigour among non-Afrikaans-speaking black students. Here it was observed that there is a vast gap between

the reported experiences of black and white students respectively, springing from the different needs each group prioritises, the perceptions they have of each other's intentions, and their lack of sufficiently engaging with the other's sincere experiences. There is also a wide gap in the expectations groups of students have of the university. Each group's (mis)perceptions are instilled by fear: White students fear that black students, representative of the government in power, will destroy everything that is 'theirs'; black students, on the other hand fear that whites will forever exclude them from the university experience.

At discussion opportunities that served as sites where such concerns could be raised, however, the presence of white students, in particular, was mainly limited to Student Representative Council (SRC) members or other student leaders. The average white Afrikaans-speaking student's apparent unawareness or ignorance of these ongoing politics can, however, not be completely divorced from the overall hesitation with which involvement with such issues is met, with said students seeming to prefer to share their grievances privately among each other in stead of exposing their objections to public scrutiny. What they experience personally, namely fear of loss of heritage, conflicts with what is expected of them publicly, namely to adapt to new circumstances and thereby contribute to overall South African harmony. Reconciling these contradictory forces within public discourse is something that only student role-players with rhetorical experience, like Adam Tas members who particularly dedicate themselves to negotiating a space for Afrikaans, seem willing to pursue, whereas the average Afrikaans-speaking white student seems hesitant to become involved in language politics. This could be why one Adam Tas member commented on the organisation's struggle to get students involved for the cause for 'promoting Afrikaans through diversity', describing the average Stellenbosch student as 'fanatically neutral'. He also wrote a letter to *Die Matie*, the Stellenbosch University newspaper, entitled 'Disheartened by students' disinterestedness' (De Wet, 2009). It seems that white Afrikaans-speaking students are very wary of becoming involved with anything that might be interpreted as non-compliant with transformation. Yet, in spite of this a moral panic related to transformation could be uncovered among some students, as will be illustrated shortly.

Among Stellenbosch students there did not seem to be any homogeneous view on language and transformation issues at the university. Yet, by looking closely enough I was able to discern a basic set of priorities that found expression through different means, e.g. the need for the Afrikaans language (and maybe the 'culture' accompanying it) to be recognised or acknowledged in South Africa, and the fear that if Afrikaans loses its central position at SU it would point to a lesser acknowledgement of Afrikaans in the country as a whole.

Stellenbosch providing a space for the Afrikaner 'habitus' entails much more than merely Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Its history as an Afrikaans university has accorded it with strongly-rooted student traditions, among others in university residences. These all serve, in students' views, to contribute to the Afrikaans character of the university, perceived by some to be threatened by the imposition of transformation objectives, particularly the increased introduction of English. White Afrikaans-speaking students' view of what the university culture entails or should entail is to a great extent influenced by expectations instilled in them by their parents who experienced Stellenbosch or other historically Afrikaans universities at a time when there were no threats to its cultural homogeneity. The uniqueness of certain *Matie* activities, coupled with the fact that these customs are perceived to be rooted historically and generationally, serves to provide White Afrikaans-speaking students with a strong sense of identity as Stellenbosch students or *Maties*. Consider the following comments:

'There is probably a culture associated with Afrikaans like the *Dagbreek*<sup>3</sup> guy playing first team rugby who goes to the *sokkie*<sup>4</sup> every Wednesday night. It's that culture, and I think many people feel comfortable and love that culture, because that is basically what the average student is, so they are comfortable with it, and they wouldn't want it to be English, because that is not what they are used to'.

'I think what most people fear is if Afrikaans is no longer an official language of instruction at Stellenbosch, that the cultural aspects linked to Afrikaans will be lost. Those things that caused my parents to make me study here, rather than at TUKS which is half an hour's drive from my home, an excellent academic institution and

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<sup>3</sup> *Dagbreek*: One of the male residences at SU

<sup>4</sup> *Sokkie*: A type of dance with a partner, popular among 'Afrikaners'

which offers the course that I'm studying. The *Neelsie-sokkies*<sup>5</sup>, Residence-rugby, sleep-over in the *Neelsie*<sup>6</sup> for *ser*<sup>7</sup> tickets, *Opskop*<sup>8</sup>, BTK<sup>9</sup>, House dances<sup>10</sup> (any form of dance actually), *Vlotte*<sup>11</sup>, *Vensters*<sup>12</sup>, Trolleys<sup>13</sup>, *Trapkarre*<sup>14</sup>. These are all very 'Afrikaans'. They are all good things, aren't they? Also, these are all things that is not the same at WITS or UCT or UJ – the 'English' universities. I know that's what I'm afraid of' (blog comment on Adam Tas website).

A large part of this unique *Matie* experience is situated in university residences, where certain traditions have been carried down from the past, and where newcomers are socialised into the university experience. Because of the majority of residences' historically Afrikaans character, the activities and traditions that are highly valued and in which residents are socialised, resemble the activities mentioned above. As has been occasionally noticed, some residences do aim to put a new spin on these traditional activities so as to make everyone feel welcome. Where the issue becomes more sensitive, however, is where first year initiation is concerned. In the report of a committee appointed by the Department of Education to investigate, and make recommendations for transformation at higher education institutions in South Africa, it has been made clear that no form of initiation ceremonies, irrespective of whether they result in bodily harm or not, will be tolerated (South Africa, 2008: 20). Students at Stellenbosch are very aware of this particular tradition being toned down, and some seem to feel that that infringes upon the overall traditional residence culture.

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<sup>5</sup> *Neelsie-sokkies*: Every Wednesday night, a *sokkie* is held in the Neelsie.

<sup>6</sup> *Neelsie*: SU's student centre.

<sup>7</sup> *Ser*: Derived from the word 'serenade', an annual event at SU during which each residence enters a group of students singing a cappella music.

<sup>8</sup> *Opskop*: A nightclub situated outside Stellenbosch with a particular 'Afrikaner' character.

<sup>9</sup> *BTK*: Abbreviation for Berg- en Toerklub, translated as 'Mountain and Tour Club': a student organisation who organises hiking trips.

<sup>10</sup> *House dance*: Every year each residence holds a formal dance event, known as a *huisdans* in Afrikaans.

<sup>11</sup> *Vlotte*: Afrikaans word for 'floats'. During SU's annual 'rag' (an event during which students raise money for charity) each residence and private ward decorates a truck which is then paraded through the streets of Stellenbosch.

<sup>12</sup> *Vensters*: Literally translated as 'windows', an event forming part of the larger annual rag at SU, during which first-years perform dance concerts in front of their respective residences which have been decorated for the purpose.

<sup>13</sup> *Trolleys*: Also forming part of the annual rag, an event whereby the first-years of each residence decorate a trolley, in which they race against each other.

<sup>14</sup> *Trapkarre*: Annual event organised by students of the SU engineering faculty, in which various contestants each build a type of small car (Afrikaans: '*trapkar*') and race it around the Neelsie.

A new residence, Metanoia, opened in Stellenbosch in 2006 to cater for the growing numbers of students seeking university accommodation. This residence, with the (dis)advantage of not having an established historically white Afrikaans cultural tradition, could start with a clean slate in accommodating diversity. It further deviates from traditional residences in that it is mixed in terms of gender, its racial composition is much more diverse, it completely did away with initiation ceremonies for first years, and its language of instruction is mainly English. What is interesting here is to analyse how students, socialised in the traditional 'Afrikaans residence culture', view this newest addition. As the overall feeling of 'residence culture' at Metanoia is much more relaxed and less homogeneous, some students outside Metanoia seem to view this new residence as a threat to the Afrikaans character of the university. One student responded as follows upon hearing that I myself resided there for two years:

'You were in Metanoia? You don't know what residence is about! Metanoia does not have the rich traditions of the traditional residences. See, academically it might be better, the richness and diversity, but to tell the truth, it works against the whole residence environment. In traditional residences you will find a loyalty and patriotism which, I almost want to say, you won't find in a diverse residence.'

Another student commented:

'On the question of whether Stellenbosch should rather stay Afrikaans medium: Mainly, especially if I think of the Coloureds of the Western Cape, then it is an empowering language, and I completely agree with Russel Botman there and will always agree with him. This is why Metanoia stands, under Chris Brink. It would never have stood under another rector, because it has a clinical modern atmosphere which people don't like, but anyway, that's another day's talk. There is a certain value system that accompanies an Afrikaans atmosphere.'

For the sake of clarity it should be mentioned that Chris Brink, the rector who preceded the rector at the time of writing, Russel Botman, was often associated by students with 'dancing to the government's tune' in 'doing away with Afrikaans and residence traditions'. As Metanoia was built during Brink's office, the student above seems to have associated the new residence with Brink's 'overly politically correct' project. What can be identified here is

reinforcing a normative definition of 'what residence is about' and a reluctance to let go of a characteristically Afrikaans value system associated with residence culture. In the face of perceived threats to an established way of doing things, the 'traditional' nature of Afrikaans activities is exerted with new-found vigour. Of interest here was that students not residing in Metanoia seemed to have an exaggerated perception of the relaxation of tradition and spirit in Metanoia, sparked by their fears of the total erosion of traditional structure, and of this new system totally answering to political correctness. Many of the ideas with which Metanoia work are in fact constructed on already established residence traditions at Stellenbosch. The house committee at Metanoia are for instance still very adamant on instilling residence spirit, pride, loyalty and patriotism through participation in traditional Stellenbosch residence activities, even though these activities are given a new spin so as to make them more accommodating to a diversity of students (South Africa, 2008: 83). One could almost say that, were these changes not located within the wider fear of erosion of everything associated with Afrikaans, the students expressing their dissatisfaction with Metanoia would not have been that concerned. The Metanoia case is insightful as its disapproval by students enables them to express their moral panic related to transformation without directly criticising transformation.

A very prevalent theme that surfaced whenever students were asked to reflect on their experience of race in residences was that of students 'sticking to their own group', especially in the dining hall. From the various ways in which this observation was reflected upon, as well as the mere fact that this race-related phenomenon received such frequent emphasis, much could be gained. What does it mean that they are giving particular attention to this in their reflections? Introduction of non-whites into residences are 'supposed' to bring more integration, but this does not necessarily lead to that integration. This spatial division was expressed by some as a completely natural phenomenon that should not be tampered with, by others as something they would have preferred to be different. An identifiable tendency, however, was for white students to regard their own space as the neutral one, where refusal to enter this space was seen to isolate oneself. Often whites sat as a group at the long tables with coloured and black students scattered around the smaller tables. Claims were then made by respondents such as 'they will never really come and sit with the white girls'. The experience in one particular residence was that

the tables in the middle of the communal space were predominantly occupied by whites, though some racial mixing also occurred there, whereas the tables at the right and left sides of the dining hall were occupied by coloured and black students respectively, constituting the 'margins'. Again the white space seemed to be perceived as the neutral first choice space. Reinforcement of the centrality of Afrikaner values at SU can also be read in the following comment by a male student:

'They also learn... there is a Xhosa first year with us who really put in an effort to mix with the white people and to learn how the Afrikaans people do things. There's, I think, a Zulu girl on our house committee who, when somebody asked her why she came to study at Stellenbosch instead of Natal, because she's from Durban, she said that she chose Stellenbosch to learn about Afrikaans and Afrikaners. You see, there is actually this... I think there are a lot of people in Stellenbosch who, especially English people, they come here to learn more about Afrikaans people, so I think some of the conflicts are prevented that way.'

A situation such as described above is very meaningful to Afrikaans-speaking white students as it reassures them that Afrikaans and the associations surrounding it still has a 'place' in South Africa, and that 'others' are acknowledging that place. This completely translates into an adaptive strategy reached through negotiation: maintaining the importance of the Afrikaans heritage, yet expressing this high valuation in such a way so as to account for the inclusion of others. Valuating Stellenbosch as an Afrikaans space while simultaneously seizing diversity, the respondent appears to show pride in the fact that this space is acknowledged by non-Afrikaans-speakers.

It seemed that the majority of students tend to refrain from involvement with loaded issues such as transformation and language due to the racial connotations. Simultaneously, generationally established traditions bring home a strong sense of *Matie* identity, the construction of which is unintentionally strengthened by a fear of its erosion, a panic uncovered by picking up on perceptions and rumours circulating among white students on campus. A more unintentional means through which the university, as a 'white space', is reinforced, was symbolised through the spatial arrangements in dining halls where the



'guest' status of non-whites is subtly internalised by all involved. Divisions were however seen to be bridged when there was recognition of Afrikaans by others.

### 3.3 Ethnic and Cultural Identity

Cultural or ethnic identities are not self-evident entities but are socially constructed categories. To present and conceptualise them as solid social units, however, amounts to essentialism (Van der Waal, 2008: 58) which refers to (an often strategic) endeavour at aiming to fix categories by ascribing to it a neat set of properties. The 'shared origins' on which ethnic identity is based is, for instance, socially constructed (Levine, 1999: 168). 'Culture', in turn, is the framework in terms of which we make sense of the world. It is not a bounded and unchanging entity, but adapts to socio-historic circumstances. Culture as a process instead of an entity is best illustrated by Geertz when he states that '...man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, [and] I take culture to be those webs...' (Geertz, 1973: 5). Therefore, to study culture is to embark on an interpretive endeavour in search of meaning. In popular discourse the term 'culture' is often used in a more essentialist way, however, in that the term is used to reduce a set of complex meanings into a more easily comprehensible set of data. By making use of 'culture' in order to explain things we actually produce culture, as people start to internalise this label. According to Lal (1988: 283) ethnic and cultural identity develop in the context of contact with significant others, as we conceptualise ourselves from the viewpoint of these others, and so become very aware of, and internalise, the characteristics that distinguish us from these others. This is then how group consciousness is conceptualised within the context of interaction (Lal, 1988: 283). Furthermore, for members of a social category to objectify their own way of living as 'culture', or of themselves as an ethnic identity, serves instrumental purposes, securing resources in insecure circumstances (Wright, 1998: 13-14). All in all, culture and ethnicity are socially constructed and fixing these categories, i.e. producing essentialism, is often a strategic response in the face of threat.

Considering some theoretical insights on ethnic identity and culture, more emphasis will be placed on how these notions are used by the white Afrikaans-speaking youth to negotiate a space for themselves in the current dispensation. These include the awareness Afrikaans-speaking whites have of themselves as a collectivity, the way they see themselves in relation to others, the language they use to articulate that which they perceive as what makes them

a collectivity, like nostalgia about heritage, 'culture', values, and essentialism, and lastly the language being used to differentiate themselves from other identities in South Africa. A deeply-rooted racial consciousness is involved in this identity construction process, illustrating the challenge faced by South Africans in moving away from race in defining oneself. Furthermore, this identity negotiation process is often mediated through the language of democracy and equality, more specifically the right to culture.

Compared to numerous internet blogs written by current or ex-South Africans about the situation in the country, fieldwork done on the SU campus produced a fairly optimistic picture of how white Afrikaans-speaking students view and negotiate their position in South Africa. They appeared to regard their Afrikaner identity in a less isolated manner and various reasons could be proposed as to why this could be the case. The university context, among others, creates a space where objectives like transformation and 'open-mindedness' are highly valued elements, with the result that students bring their opinions and priorities in alignment with these. Internet blogs and newspaper letters, on the other hand, provide opportunities for opinions to be raised anonymously, or at least facelessly, generated from a position often far removed from contextual realities that could pose a challenge to such proposed assumptions. Through written contributions, bloggers are then empowered to reinforce a particular view of Afrikaner identity as under severe threat, whereas university students are in a position where they have to abide to transformation policies, consequently obliging them to negotiate their identity within a context where integration is the ideal.

This could be illustrated by contrasting students' views to, what shall be termed for the purpose of this study, an 'isolated identity rhetoric', a tendency picked up when investigating right-wing sentiments as it surfaced in newspapers and the internet. In this regard, one particular website entry was interesting to consider (Boer in ballingskap, 2008). Written in the form of a narrative, it tells the 'story' of the 'Afrikaner' from their genesis right through to a projection of the future where 'Afrikaners' are seen to face extinction. This, and other similar interpretations of the way the Afrikaners and the country are heading, all seem more reflective of their fears than of reality. Adherents of such 'philosophies' seem to approach experience with a certain pre-set of assumptions, with the result that everything consequently experienced is interpreted so as to confirm those assumptions, hence the assumptions about interracial relationships in the country ('blacks

are out to get the whites') and the experience of crime as confirmation of those assumptions. Such experience informs a situation where many Afrikaners are always and immediately on their guard against any form of threat to their identity.

The manner in which Afrikaner identity is proposed in the example mentioned is to present Afrikaner as an organic unit with a fixed set of characteristics, stable, homogeneous and clearly delineated boundaries. It reproduces some of the fears prevailing among white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans uncritically, that is, does not acknowledge the representation as simply a fear, but as a threatening reality. In so doing, the author is not acknowledging the fact that white Afrikaans-speakers' reality is in fact informed by such fears. Flowing from this, it could be argued that how one thinks of oneself at present – Afrikaners as an organic whole, with a particular set of recognisable characteristics and clearly delineated boundaries – will eventually determine how one perceives the future. The view proposed in the above-mentioned example is indeed that this organic whole as we see it now will not stand the test of time, and consequently the Afrikaner will become 'extinct'. This constitutes a fairly simplified notion of 'culture' that does not take into consideration that we, ourselves, decide what an Afrikaner is, or is supposed, to entail. Observation in multiracial student settings makes this 'isolated identity rhetoric' seem ridiculous and paranoid, painting a picture of adherents of such a rhetoric's exposure as being limited. Some values and practices conventionally associated with the category Afrikaner, e.g. the Afrikaans language, Protestant-Christian related ethics, practices like *braai* (barbeque) and rugby, etc., are so deeply embedded in South African society, transferred and reinforced in such a way as to adjust to circumstances, incidents and situations, that these elements are far from becoming extinct. The extent to which a changing South Africa will encroach upon what people know and are used to, as proposed in the 'isolated identity rhetoric', seems overrated. What does happen, however, is that the tendency toward greater integration will lead to a greater exchange of ideas and practices. The chosen means of thinking about 'Afrikaner' in this isolated manner, and the narrative that results from this thinking does, however, paint a picture in which the Afrikaner and everything familiar to this identity will eventually vanish. It is when clinging to the notion of Afrikaner as an organic whole, that the victim rhetoric becomes sellable.

Some elements of this rhetoric that were identified among students included: romanticising the past, exaggerating the perception of a threat from outside, presenting Afrikaner culture as something with particular characteristics, or showing pride in what is regarded as being uniquely Afrikaner. Stellenbosch students do, however, seem to be moving away from considering their Afrikaner identity in this isolated manner. Another element highlighted during fieldwork among students was negotiating an image of the 'Afrikaner' that is compatible with current-day democratic principles. The question could thus be asked as to what extent the transformation-driven institution influences the adoption of this more negotiating approach to Afrikaner identity? Examples of employment of the whole repertoire of strategies mentioned above, whether essentialist or negotiation-orientated, will consequently be examined, starting with students' responses to the De la Rey song. Consider the following reflection on Afrikaner identity by a student:

'I only realised afterwards, after the hype, when there was talk about this terrible De la Rey and this racist song – that was when I listened to it for the first time. I never knew what it was, and it's so cute. To me it feels like us Afrikaners at some stage stood together, but now we don't stand together anymore. I don't know history that well, so I can't say, yay, I agree with what the Afrikaners did, yay, the English were wrong or whatever, but it was a fact that we stood together.'

The student further went on to talk about how Afrikaners have a long past of being oppressed, in which they were, among others, prohibited from speaking Afrikaans during colonial times, and that this is often neglected by non-white people who merely associate the Afrikaner past with apartheid and racism. In retrospect, it is not clear what exactly the student was referring to when speaking about the oppression of Afrikaans during colonial times and she probably only had a vague idea herself, but evoking such a theme does illustrate a need to present a much more favourable image of the Afrikaner past than is currently perceived to circulate. The De la Rey song served as the ideal medium through which such a favourable image could be proposed, urging people identifying as Afrikaners to mobilise around the notion of a shared romantic past. The uncritical acceptance of the song's depiction is what makes it so successful as a means through which ethnic mobilisation can be achieved. Even though referring to a threat long gone, that which the English posed to the Boers during the Anglo Boer War, the mere evoking of a threat is

enough to spark a resistant attitude among adherents of the song, as was illustrated by the following student when asked to comment on the song *De la Rey* in the context of the residence where he stays:

‘See, I really pulled their legs with music like that, *De la Rey* and ‘die Stem’, things like that. See, they know I’m from a small town, we do as we like. Usually when I go home on a Friday, after I’ve finished early in the morning, I put on my Afrikaans music. Many of the guys came knocking on my door saying: ‘listen’..., but then I just told them: go, you listen to your music.’

When asked why he thinks ‘they’ (non-white students) seem to be offended by the song, he responded:

‘You’re asking me! Understand, the song has absolutely nothing to do with apartheid. It is about the Boer War. They weren’t involved in it, so it’s basically between Afrikaans people, the Boer generation, and the English, but now they want to come and raise their voices against it and I don’t understand it. That’s why I, when they tell me not to play that song, I just turn the sound on louder, because it has absolutely nothing to do with them. See, I don’t allow myself to be oppressed or intimidated, not at all. Just as they listen to their ‘Bring me my machine gun’<sup>15</sup> rubbish and sing their *toyi toyi*<sup>16</sup> songs, understand, if it brings them joy, so be it, but understand, if they don’t like my music, I am not going to take any notice of it. See, if I listen to it softly, it’s my own privacy, it’s my room, whatever, and they must respect it just as I respect their privacy.’

In the context of others objecting to the music he listens to, the music becomes even more articulated as an expression of his identity, because now it needs to be expressed in the light of forces perceived as posing a threat to it. These threats allow the opportunity to defend it, to take a stance. As a consequence the music serves to him as articulating the boundaries between himself and others, a context in which the ‘us’ and ‘they’ get clear referents. It is a terrain where the contestation of space can take place where each party is

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Bring me my machine gun’: English translation for *Umshini Wami*, a Zulu language song developed in the context of the struggle against apartheid, still sung at ANC rallies.

<sup>16</sup> *Toyi-Toyi*: A South African dance, often practiced during political protests and strikes.

supposed to respect the other's space. The idea of others possibly attempting to undermine his identity elicits emotional response to the point where negative evaluations are expressed on 'their' music. It is within the context of the broader rhetoric, in which South African whites often experience themselves as being oppressed by the black-led government, that this felt need for defensiveness should be situated. The following quote by a student serves as illustration of how the us/them group consciousness scheme is immediately evoked in response to a negative experience:

'No, I have a number of coloured pals and the cleaning lady in our passage, I am really fond of her, love her! So it's not that big an issue, but then there's like yesterday when I got the news that a friend of mine was hijacked and then she crossed a red light to get away and a car drove into her and she died. If it weren't for the, I am going to say *hotnot*<sup>17</sup>, who hijacked her, then this accident would never have happened and it makes me become... I wouldn't say racist, just very negative. Crime causes me to look differently at coloured people, because at the end of the day it's just them. Poverty is not a reason to commit murder. If say a white guy shoots a black guy, he will have issues and problems for years to come, but if say the black guy shoots the white man, he's probably going to sit for a week and a half, and then he goes on. Why does the one justify the other, I almost want to say.'

The reason for citing this response is to point out the racialised group consciousness dynamics evoked by extremely negative incidents such as a botched hijacking and a resulting fatal car accident. Even though an attempt is made to illustrate his favourable relationship to coloured people, he apparently finds it hard to prevent his anger from culminating into racist inclinations when discussing the events leading to his friend's fatal accident. In his anger the whole rhetoric that pitches white against black in an us/them fashion is once again evoked, the fact that the hijacker was coloured and the victim white immediately becoming a main referent dominating possible interpretations of this incident. It becomes ethnically and racially group-based, fitting into a readily interpreted schema in which whites are suffering the consequences of a system perceived to be out of control.

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<sup>17</sup> *Hotnot*: Derogatory term used to refer to a 'coloured' person.

Above are merely the most extreme examples of responses to events characterised by strong group consciousness, keeping in mind that this was a fairly widespread tendency throughout the interviews and other fieldwork. Illustrating consciousness of one's own racial group identity was also encountered in response to issues such as the language policy at SU, racism accusations, corruption, government ineptness and affirmative action. These issues, just like crime and the De la Rey song, are all built on the subtext, and in turn evoke racialised discourse to such an extent that it has become nearly impossible to divorce these topics from racial group consciousness. What somehow distinguishes these quoted responses from the others, however, is the explicitness with which 'race' is cited as the main element in group differentiation. In most cases attempts were made to mask racial consciousness within a class-, language- and especially culture-based rhetoric.

The language of cultural differences is easily employable as it does not necessarily require a revision of a previously held racial schema, but simply translates its fundamental assumptions into the use of the term 'culture' instead of 'race'. Secondly, it is *safe* as the term 'culture' is a highly valued notion in current-day South Africa, a basic human right inscribed in the constitution, seen as contributing to the country's rich multiculturalism. Because of the high value attributed to it, the language of cultural differences is then, lastly, *effective*, particularly in achieving aims surrounding differentiation and self-advancement. In sum, the 'cultural rhetoric' provides a neat map of society and is easy to sell. During fieldwork it was interesting to identify some of the rhetorical uses to which the word 'culture' was placed. Informants seemed to cite the notion as a justification for doing the things and thinking the way they do, to legitimate those practices within which they feel safe, all coming down to stating: 'It is my culture and I have a right to it, and if someone else objects to me doing these things they are preventing me from expressing my culture.' Commenting on the controversy that surrounded the De la Rey song a few years back, a student noted:

'I mean, if a person from another culture is angry at me for liking my own culture in spite of the fact that a part of it is bad, I feel sorry for that person, but I am not going to stand back for things that happened in my past to make someone else feel better, I mean, what for? He also has his history and culture of which he can be proud of.'

Culture serves here as the ideal medium through which the positive aspects can be distinguished from the negative apartheid connotations of Afrikanership. Another student put pride in listening to Afrikaans music as she regarded it as part of her culture:

‘Yea, it’s not exactly my favourite music [laughs], but I don’t know, it feels like it’s part of my culture, even though the words don’t make sense, it’s just nice to be happy about it. It’s just your traditional, kind of, culture...’

Culture is regarded here as an important resource that provides each person with a sense of identity, belonging and ultimately fulfilment. What draws her to Afrikaans music is not its quality but her perception of it as expression of culture, an asset highly valued. Culture can further be utilised to give content to a category, distinguishing it from other ethnic categories. Students identified some of the distinguishing characteristics of an ‘Afrikaner’ as a person who enjoys the practices of *braai*, rugby and *sokkie* dances. The most important implication the language of cultural differences has for the way racial differences are perceived and conceptualised, lies in the observation that culture can serve as a marker of, and justification for, perceived differences, legitimating the physical separation that flows from such perceived differences, as the following comment illustrates:

‘I mean, I would find coloured people who, they are decent and I don’t have a problem with it, I have coloured friends myself, but I mean when the alcohol starts flowing they become very loud and it’s like a huge difference. And among black people they have large families where Afrikaners don’t have that. I mean for us our cousins and aunts aren’t as important as they are for black people.’

From all the possible factors joining people across race, culture is delineated as the one constant factor that keeps certain divisions in place. Cultural difference is then cited as a means of dismissing any involvement in practices one is not comfortable with. In this regard the responses to cross racial sexual relationships consistently evoked the cultural rhetoric:

‘I don’t mind it [cross racial sexual relationships], but it is difficult, because they are different cultures.’

‘Look, I don’t mind having such friends, but when you start marrying and raising your children there are vast differences. Many people say it’s a means of racial



discrimination, but I can say the same about marrying a German or a French man. You can't do it. You can but it's going to be difficult, because there are differences.'

Referring to French and German mixed marriages is to illustrate that it is not about skin colour, but about culture, seen as a much more legitimate and acceptable reason for avoiding such relations. The challenges faced when students of different races share a residence, in terms of co-operation, co-habitation and possible compromises are also explained through reference to cultural differences:

'One must put in an effort to reach an understanding between different cultures. It's difficult to learn to understand all the different cultures, especially if you were raised in your culture'.

Considered in relation to other responses by the same student, this comment seemed to have been made from the basis of a certain view of South African society as consisting of a vast number of 'cultures' for whom this residence provides the opportunity to meet and confront each other. Overall, reference to 'culture' in the context of this particular study was mainly in an attempt to empty categories of their race-based content, as summed up by the following response:

'To me 'Afrikaner' does not have a colour. I define it in terms of associating on the basis of culture'.

The ethnographer should not be naïve when subjects speak about themselves as a culture, but should at all times be aware of the social constructedness of the notion. Ways of living, norms and values are packaged, presented and marketed as 'culture' in a quest for ensuring survival in uniquely challenging circumstances (Wright, 1998: 14). One student reflected on 'Afrikanerdom' as follows:

'Part of our *volk's*<sup>18</sup> culture is, see, our nation enjoys giving, they are very hospitable people... so one must give and take a little between English and Afrikaans, so that people can work together and find a middle ground from which they can work'.

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<sup>18</sup> *Volk*: Afrikaans word for 'nation', though with a particularly Afrikaner nationalist connotation.

Therefore, the culture rhetoric is used to negotiate a space for oneself. Ethnic classification is empty when it only holds value to, or is imposed from, outsiders, but gets filled when it becomes meaningful to the classifieds themselves (Levine, 1999: 171). This meaning is achieved not only when a category is accepted as given, but when members can achieve certain aims on the basis of this identification (Levine, 1999: 175). The category ceases to be merely imposed, but becomes something experienced (Levine, 1999: 175). The priority accorded to group membership as opposed to individual identity ultimately has a profound impact on how we perceive reality (Levine, 1999: 169). In the quote above, a student has attempted to fill the Afrikaner category with content that ensures and incites its survival.

This brings us to the negotiation of identity, an endeavour in which the white Afrikaans-speaking youth seem to be deeply engaged. Instead of rejecting the Afrikaner category due to its negative connotations, they see the potential that this category could hold for them and engage in a negotiation of its place and definition. This negotiation process could be noted in the following response by a student when asked to define 'Afrikaner':

'I think the first definition was fairly, the Afrikaner is white, Christian and Afrikaans-speaking, but today Afrikaner is more a way of living, something you associate yourself with, someone who aspires to a high value system, doing it from an Afrikaans perspective, someone who is hospitable, someone who is open and does not exclude but includes'.

Like the previous informant, this student is negotiating a characterisation of Afrikaner. Acknowledging stereotypes he perceives to exist, he tries to find a midway between this image and how he, as an Afrikaner, wants to be perceived. This proved to be a core element of negotiation of Afrikaner identity in many responses during my interviews. Returning to Levine's idea of empty categories that get filled, it is interesting how people identifying as Afrikaners attempt very hard to give content to this category which makes it compatible with, and ensures its survival within, the current changing context, a context particularly characterised by a need to get along with non-Afrikaners. This negotiation is most explicitly illustrated by an Adam Tas member when asked to define the goal of their organisation:

'Our mission statement is 'transformation in Afrikaans'. We want to promote transformation in the country and on campus through Afrikaans so Afrikaans won't

be seen as an obstacle to transformation, but as an aid through which transformation can be accomplished. Because there is this stigma to Afrikaans, because it is anti-transformation and anti this and that, but in the meantime it is one of the official languages of the country, and part of the heritage of this country. I mean, you are not going to attain true transformation in this country by making everything English. I mean, if you are going to exclude the other languages and cultures then it is exactly the opposite of transformation. Transformation points precisely to *diversity*, not *uni*-versity, so one must be careful.'

Negotiation for a depiction of the concept 'Afrikaner' as in-line with currently highly valued ideals in South Africa is prioritised to such an extent so as to form part of their mission statement. Not only does Adam Tas want to avoid being an obstacle to transformation, they want to become an aid in the process. This favourable image of Afrikaans is produced by 'proving the stigma wrong' as well as emphasising it as part of the South African heritage, the ultimate marketing strategy. 'Diversity' is conceptualised in such a manner so as to see the promotion of English as a threat to it, where emphasis is put on Afrikaans language and culture's equal status to other non-English languages and cultures in South Africa. This constitutes an argument perfectly in line with South African cultural rights rhetoric, presented logically with the aim of carving out a legitimate space for Afrikaans. Lastly, consider the function of a nostalgic formulation like the following:

'It's just like when they say Afrikaans is going to be wiped out in schools and everywhere, but you cannot remove Afrikaans from a guy's heart. In the same way you cannot remove Afrikaans from my heart as I feel that this is where I'm from and where I'm going. It's something that people live'.

The idea of an Afrikaner core that remains consistent and which is intuitively felt is constructed within the context of verbal interactions such as these. What is subconsciously done above is not to describe a state of affairs, but an active contribution in shaping the idea of 'Afrikaner' into something functional. These ideas are then embraced by fellow role-players during interaction as valid content and become experienced as part of their Afrikaner-ness.

This section has attempted to shed some light on how white Afrikaans-speaking students conceptualise and assert their Afrikaner identity. Higher education integration seems to provide the opportunity for adopting a more relational, as opposed to an isolated, approach to these students' Afrikaner identity, opening the doors for optimism about the future, instead of painting a picture of futility. Considering the different ways in which Afrikaner identity is being conceptualised, it seems that the category 'Afrikaner' has the potential to be filled with content answering to a wide array of needs. Afrikaner identity can be conceptualised both in an essentialist way when faced with threat, as well as in a way that illustrates its compatibility to its environment. In the end, a unique combination of these elements is present in the discourse of the respondents where different conceptualisations of Afrikaner identity were evoked strategically in moment to moment speaking positions. More focus will now be accorded to the elements in this discourse that point to attempts at adapting to SU's institutional goals.

### **3.4 The language of adaptation**

Blommaert (2005: 232) states that '[t]he performance of identity is not a matter of articulating one identity, but of the mobilisation of a whole repertoire of identity features converted into complex and subtle moment-to-moment speaking positions'. In the above section, examples have been provided of respondents utilising elements of nostalgia, clear-cut cultural differences and pride in response to race and identity related questions. Respondents, however, tended to shift between expressing themselves in terms of the unique essentialist characteristics that distinguishes them as Afrikaners and the adaptability and inclusiveness of their identity, as was required by the situatedness of the discussion. It has been illustrated in the previous section how nostalgic and essentialist elements were, for instance, employed when sharing their sentiments on De la Rey. In instances where the issue of transformation was raised, however, the priority shifted toward presenting themselves in terms of 'open-mindedness', adaptability and inclusivity, as will be highlighted next.

Here we have to do with the ability of texts to travel across contexts. The skills associated with 'voice' are based on whether one succeeds in carrying an intended meaning across different contexts, which means to have at one's disposal the knowledge of which linguistic resources to use in which contexts (Blommaert, 2005: 69). In short, the elements

constituting the language of adaptation are the know-how of utilising suitable linguistic resources at the appropriate time after the speaker has managed to make a proper assessment of the context in which his utterance is being received. Regarding the language of adaptation, the following tendencies were picked up on during fieldwork: the way in which many white Afrikaans-speaking respondents attempted to present themselves, rested on what they perceived to be the desirable image, i.e. non-racist/tolerant, as placing high value on the notion of a 'paradigm shift'. Also, this discourse is characterised by a willingness to make concessions, acknowledging that change is good for them. This could lead to subjects changing the way they identify themselves, for instance identifying themselves primarily as South Africans rather than Afrikaners, or shifting the boundaries of *Afrikanerdom* to make it more inclusive.

When people speak, the question must always be asked: to whom are they speaking, or who are they addressing? As Blommaert (2005: 73) suggests, not only do the speakers rely on an immediate uptake of their utterances, but also direct them towards a 'superaddressee'. Thus along with expecting a certain immediate response to what they have said, the speakers also, at the same time, attempt to express something that can be judged in absolute terms, for instance by 'absolute truth' or 'the moral order' (Blommaert, 2005: 73). It is with reference to the latter that they are adhering to language norms or rules (2005: 73). With both the uses of superior and inferior dialects, standard or slang etc., the respondent is in effect considering not only the immediate responsive uptake by his listeners of what he says, but also to the higher-level standard or norm of what type of speech is deemed appropriate in that particular circumstance. This should be considered by the ethnographer when gaining testimonies from subjects: different discourses will be put to use when they speak among one another and when they speak to the ethnographer.

Respondents seemed to realise that appeals to certain frames of reference will not be received well, whereas certain other frameworks are very much required when discussing issues surrounding race and transformation as a Stellenbosch student. The 'superaddressee' in the case of this research would be the norms and values governing post-apartheid democracy and equality. Students, for instance, realised that the discourse of white-boss-black-worker does not belong to the realm of tertiary education transformation. It only belongs to a discourse where people share this meaning.

Many respondents referred to transformation-induced exposure as a preparation for the 'outside world', thereby illustrating awareness of a changing South African reality and a need to adapt to it. Furthermore the notion of a 'paradigm shift' is highly valued and exposure to new experience is contrasted to stagnation where people are seen to remain isolated from new experience. Terms that were often heard included contrasting a situation where one is raised in a 'protected, isolated way' with the integration objectives at SU that 'broadens horizons' and prepares one in terms of the 'outside world' or the 'bigger world'. A very salient tendency in this regard was a constant emphasis on how exposure to different cultures will be of advantage in the working world. With regards to the integration they experienced at residences, some students conceded:

'Well, I think it's cool because it prepares one for the world out there, because when I work one day that's how it will be'.

'Yes, I'm definitely now more used to everything. When I enter the working world one day it won't be such a shock. I'll be able to adapt more easily'.

In some residences it was reported that room allocations were still done on the grounds of race. One female residence was reported to have a tradition where a senior student adopts a first year student as her 'sister'. The house committee then allocated these pairings by placing black first years with black seniors. Commenting on these tendencies a student who previously resided in this residence commented:

'But I feel that doing it this way was in real poor taste, and like, because my point is, when you work one day, you will not be able to choose who your boss is. You won't be able to choose with whom you work, and if you are raised in such a protected, kind of isolated way, it will be a huge shock when you work one day.'

The same sentiment was expressed by another student with regards to the perceived advantages of the multilingual T-option, where Afrikaans and English students are put together in one class, as opposed to the parallel option where Afrikaans and English have classes separately.

'If you separate Afrikaans and English, as in an Afrikaans class and an English class, then you still divide people on the basis of language, and to me university should be

about learning stuff from each other. I mean we are not here merely for academic reasons but also to get to know other people and other cultures. When you walk out of this university one day you are in a world where you have to work with hundreds of different people, and if you don't already learn at school or university how to get along with other people, how is that helpful? So if you only have your classes in Afrikaans, and after four years of only Afrikaans you walk out of this university and you suddenly have to work with English people, it's going to be very difficult.'

The same student proposed his membership to the *Voortrekkers*<sup>19</sup>, an Afrikaner organisation seen as placing high premium on exposing its members to other cultures, as providing him with 'a better start in life' and 'opening [his] eyes to the world'. Contrasting his Stellenbosch experience with that of his dad who also studied at Stellenbosch years ago, he equates these changes with 'people becoming more aware of what goes on in the world'. As university serves as preparation for the work environment, exposure to diversity is regarded as a crucial addition to merely learning job-related skills. Interesting in these and other similar instances cited above is the contrasting of the home environment as isolated and protected, with the 'world out there' that could prevent a possible shock, and regarding the university as a mediator between the two. Most important however, is how transformation is expressed in terms of providing exposure that will come in handy later in life.

Another strategy employed in the language of adaptation is articulating distance from Afrikaners who are regarded as 'stagnating', people whose behaviour is seen as indicative of an adherence to outdated frameworks, characterised by a discourse that is not suited to the current South African context. As Blommaert (2005: 72) stated, a discourse can travel in form, but its '[v]alue, meaning and function are a matter of uptake, they have to be granted by others on the basis of the prevailing orders of indexicality'. It is where an utterance is rendered in a context where firstly, it is not received well, where secondly, it does not succeed in performing the desired function, and where thirdly, misunderstanding and conflict results. In such instances, the value of the utterance changes (Blommaert, 2005: 72). Distancing themselves from right-wing Afrikaners comes down to regarding such people as

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<sup>19</sup> *Voortrekkers*: An Afrikaans language youth organisation whose existence is based on the principles of Afrikanership, Citizenship and Christianity.

incompetent assessors of context due to a lack of exposure, or unwillingness to undergo a 'paradigm shift'. 'They' are thus perceived as failing to bring their intentions across adequately or in a productive way. This serves as an important means of 'othering' racism and illustrating students' own level of adaptability.

'You know, there are many who moan and complain about affirmative action and the impact politics have on them. These people argue that they weren't part of apartheid, so why must they..., but those same people are also very apathetic. They are the people who don't vote, who don't go to political debates, those type of things. I know I'm generalising now (laughs), but that is the knowledge that I have. If you take the DA [Democratic Alliance] for instance: they are very positive. They are at times politically aggressive towards other political parties, but the root of their existence, I would say, is this positive approach to South Africa. I think the people who seriously complain about affirmative action and the country's economy and land reform and those type of things, are the same guys who sit around the braai-fire, moaning and whining without doing anything about it'.

Commenting on the observed presence at an ANC rally she attended during the run-up to the 2009 general elections, another student said:

'It was interesting for me to see there was a mix... people were mostly black, but there were coloured speakers, a few white people... I didn't feel threatened in the first place, though, as I thought, like there once was that idea where people thought, ah, yeah, we must move out of South Africa, white people must flee from South Africa, because as soon as Mandela dies, the whole South Africa will be taken over. I don't think... It's so dumb. I can't believe, wow, that people would think something like that in the first place. Really, some of my friends believed that. Someone even wanted to buy a house in France so they could flee as soon as it happens.'

A few students expressed what they perceived to be as a sharp contrast in racial tolerance between inhabitants of the Western Cape, and those living in the more northern parts of South Africa, particularly with reference to Gauteng and the Free State.



‘You know, it’s weird, the Cape is actually very liberal. We down here are A-OK. We attended a discussion at the *Voortrekker* Monument, along with the *Voortrekkers*, Freedom Front Plus, *Rapportryers*, and various other Afrikaner organisations, and I was quite shocked to see how those people... They are so conservative, narrow-minded, pre-apartheid orientated, you can’t even joke about it! ...It was a kind of leadership conference where an attempt was made to bring all the youth leaders together, to discuss the state of affairs in South Africa. Later I didn’t know what to do anymore, because they were constantly speaking about ‘the Afrikaner’, ‘the Afrikaner’, until I asked: But Sir, what does ‘Afrikaner’ refer to? What it amounted to was white, Afrikaans and Christian, and that was horrible! (laughs). Those are exactly the kind of things that we are working on in the new South Africa, the type of things one must avoid, because I stood there and asked: But listen here, Sir, you do realise that there are Afrikaans-speaking people who are not white? It is as if they don’t realise these things. No, people up there are very conservative.’

As representative of an organisation (youth branch of the ATKV) that exerts itself to approaching the Afrikaans language and identity in an inclusive manner, this student’s aim was to move away from any normative definitions of ‘Afrikaner’. The more exclusive approach of some other Afrikaner organisations that the respondent encountered at the meeting that was mentioned was perceived by her as conservative and outdated. It is attitudes such as what she observed at that meeting that she feels is detrimental to and hampers the attempts to negotiate Afrikaans identity through inclusivity. She describes her feeling when encountering these opinions as ‘shocked’, describing the opinions she encountered as ‘conservative, narrow-minded, pre-apartheid orientated’. Such a type of formulation can be considered together with the previous citations where white complaints are discredited by associating it with apathy, and where another rejects her white friends’ paranoia as ridiculous: it reinforces the current taboo accorded to an Afrikaner isolated identity rhetoric among students who regard themselves as in touch with reality.

As mentioned previously, awareness was picked up among informants of a certain stigma clinging to the term Afrikaner. Redefining the term as more inclusive served as a means of resisting this stigma, illustrating their own adaptability. An informant proposed the following definition of Afrikaner:

‘I see it as someone who can associate with Afrikaner history. I know there is a conventional definition of ‘Afrikaner’, and that definition is what prevails in practice. The definition that I want to propose, however, is an Afrikaner who... I want to include the slave workers, the coloured Afrikaans-speaking struggle figures, so someone with an Afrikaans history, inclusive, who identifies with this inclusive Afrikaans history / origins. But it refers more to merely an ‘Afrikaans-speaker’, so the distinction between ‘Afrikaner’ and ‘Afrikaanse’, I don’t want there to be a distinction’.

Making use of the word ‘propose’ here indeed indicates the negotiability of the definition of Afrikaner, and consequently of self-definition in general. Another inclusive strategy would be to prioritise your identity as a South African as opposed to Afrikaner:

‘I really feel that when people sing Shosolozza, then I sing along, because to me it’s, you know, I am proud of that song, it is South African, and I am a South African’.

The responses cited above are indicative of subjects adapting their rhetoric to what they know is being expected of them as SU students, and more broadly as post-apartheid South Africans, and through adherence to both of these, illustrating the adaptability of the institution they find themselves in to the broader post-apartheid South African ideals. These adaptations have only occurred after a proper assessment of the context they knew their utterances would be received in, and mediating their intentions through such adaptive discourse then enables the successful transfer of their ‘texts’, so that they don’t in effect lose voice. At the end of the day, they serve as strategies for survival. Students realise that they can make it easier for themselves by shifting their priorities in such a way so as to articulate exposure to diversity to their advantage, expressing their awareness of the unacceptability of certain outdated discourse, and by negotiating a more inclusive definition of Afrikaner identity.

### **3.5 Macrostructure provided by the media**

To study newspaper content over a period of time does far more than reveal merely particular events that happened at particular times. Considering such content as a whole can indeed reveal a lot about how societies situate themselves within and in relation to the world around them (Maritz, 2008: 224). In newspapers aimed at an Afrikaans-speaking

readership of whom the majority is mostly white, certain meta-narratives can be read which reveal how 'Afrikaners' make sense of their own position in the country. The goal of this section is not to reach any clear-cut conclusions as to the influence of the media, but to paint a picture, through reference to what is published and read in newspapers on a daily basis, of the kind of society that is depicted, both through 'shunning' and 'idealising' in, for instance, reports, columns and letters.

Something complicating the issue of race, is identification with people whom one regards the same as yourself, identification on the basis of perceived shared characteristics. Your whiteness privileges you when, for example, the authoritative figure deciding your fate is also white, and he/she (subconsciously) allows this identification to impair his/her decision. This was, for instance, seen in how certain letter-writers who self-identified as 'white', illustrated sympathy for the *Waterkloof 4*, four white youngsters who assaulted and killed a homeless black man. As Lewis (2004: 636) states: 'Identification with *same* (as opposed to distancing oneself from *other*) leads to complexity of understanding and empathy and to the assumption of primary if not inherent innocence'. The deep-seated embodiment of racial othering is, among others, characterised by an assumption of inherent innocence of those one identifies with closely, as opposed to a deep-seated suspicion of those regarded as 'other'. Evidently, the normalisation and 'us'-ness of whiteness turns it into a resource in terms of the favourable expectations accorded to it (Lewis, 2004: 637). By drawing on a repertoire of discursive elements circulating among the Afrikaans community, an Afrikaans language newspaper seeks to establish its readership's identification with them, in the process reinforcing the 'us'-ness of its readership. A predominantly white Afrikaans newspaper can consequently provide a space in which the interests of this readership category can be both reinforced when utilisation of whiteness as a resource is reflected, and contested when such endeavours are pointed out by yet other contributors.

Although written contributions more explicitly reinforcing the 'myth of the dark continent' are limited to letter-writers, i.e. people writing in an unofficial capacity, the choice of political issues being reported on and the way they are presented in main headings, more often than not, points to a meta-narrative where white role-players are played out against the black-led ANC. Consider for instance headings such as 'Whites against 2010', an interpretation of an utterance made by the South African minister in the presidency, Essop

Pahad, claiming that many white South Africans do not want the 2010 Soccer World Cup to succeed (Muhamed, 2008). Add to this headings such as 'ANC wants to reconcile' with reference to a meeting that was held between the ANC and Afrikaner-led organisations (De Lange, 2008), and 'Afrikaners the only white tribe', in referral to an utterance made by then ANC leader Jacob Zuma during his meeting with Afrikaner interest groups (Du Toit, 2009). These all fit into the meta-narrative of a situation where the opposition between white Afrikaner interests and 'black' ANC-led objectives is articulated. Influenced by their readership among whom newspaper editors know a fear exists that 'the ANC is out to get the Afrikaner whites', these headings and agendas are chosen so as to immediately capture the attention of everyone whose consciousnesses are plagued by white-versus-black related fears. What is important here, however, is that such methods of reporting do not merely reflect societal tendencies, but simultaneously influence the narratives shaping the public's perception. Consequently, through their endeavour to increase their readership through appealing headings and agenda-setting, cognitive frameworks based on racial and ethnic boundaries are in effect reinforced.

Due to South Africa's racially permeated socio-historical context and the consequent sensitivity and value-ladenness accorded to race, any race-related incidents reported on are bound to incite strong reaction, debate and controversy. Further after-effects of such incidents can then be followed through so as to form a narrative, wherein subsequent issues of a newspaper present the 'sequels' to a story. Such narratives can easily be subtly manipulated so as to confirm certain fears, assumptions or ideals so that the act of reading this content serves to meaningfully contribute to the frameworks in terms of which we relate ourselves to the context around us.

Probably the most salient example of such a narrative is that which followed the Reitz incident. This 'story' was followed through from a shocking revelation stating 'Race bomb explodes around video' (Cloete, 2008), to the after-effects and implications it had for the larger integration project at tertiary institutions in South Africa (Kruger, 2009a). Interesting is the way in which the 'after effects' were presented in Rapport: 'Kovsie-crisis: One year later', where students who reacted by means of withdrawing into exclusivity, 'In new residence birds of a feather flock together', is contrasted to situations where students were seen as putting an effort into reaching the integration ideal, 'Love of one's neighbour

prevails in this residence' (Kruger, 2009a). This drastic contrast between racial exclusivity and inclusivity is exactly the dualist schemas around which debate, controversy and fascination is situated, as these are the themes seen to constitute the main challenge for South African societal harmony.

A salient theme in the media at the time of writing, 'race in higher education', was specifically stimulated by the Reitz incident. The public's eyes were now focused on such issues. This is then the context in which more recent race incidents and issues enjoyed media attention ('Race incidents at US sharply on the increase', Venter, 2009). A conversation on the issue has started, creating a receptive space for the continuation of the narrative. Readers now want to know what will happen next so they can add pieces to the story in order to shape a meaningful whole at the end. This is then how the media involves itself with agenda-setting, taking the lead in what should publicly be perceived as relevant issues currently, in turn spurring on the 'race debates' that followed. The discussion initiatives attended at the University, and the topics raised during these, also seemed to have been influenced by media agenda-setting to a great extent, especially since the open discussion on 'racism' followed, and was directly linked to, the racial incidents at SU that were reported on.

It is also within this context that the publishing of an event where a right-wing Afrikaner movement under the leadership of Eugene Terre'blanche, *Ossewa Brandwag*, congregated along with a large group of Afrikaans-speaking whites, took place: 'Paranoia and anxiety in the lager: The leader speaks in Mosselbaai' (Gerber, 2008). With racial exclusivity again set as the agenda, this column was bound to incite anger, fascination, admiration, dumbfoundedness, but most importantly, a picture of South African society characterised by stark division. Racial and ethnic extremism, the most taboo of areas in South Africa, is here made into an object of the reader's curiosity which can once again be seen as a way of establishing a distance between 'mainstream' racial discourse and right-wing sentiments.

Further examples manifesting in the past year of how the race issue intrigues people are readers' divided comments on the depiction of cross-racial romance on one of the country's most watched soap operas, *Sewende Laan*, ranging from praise to utter loathing (Anon, 2009), questions whether the old apartheid flag should be banned (Carstens, 2009), right

down to a debate that emerged around whether a Zulu pupil who joined the *Voortrekker* organisation may be deemed an 'Afrikaner' (Kruger, 2009b). Issues that play themselves out here are that of boundaries, inclusion and exclusion. The mere tendency of inviting polemic on these topics suggests that rather than there being static ideas about race-related issues being propagated or imposed through the print media, the issues are consciously being exposed to negotiation, indeed also a recognition on the newspaper editor's side that opinions on these topics and issues vary widely and are bound to be heated and emotional. Ultimately, one of the strongest indications of the deeply embedded 'racial-ness' of our everyday perceptions are our fascination with far-right tendencies as well as with any race related debates whatsoever.

What has been labelled among the public as 'the playing of the race card' was particularly salient during the months before this thesis was written, not only by politicians to dismiss critique by white politicians, but also by a white immigrant who gained asylum status in Canada on the grounds that he as white is being targeted by blacks in South Africa (Anon, 2009). Race is thus an arena where battles are fought. As it is a term carrying the baggage of either blame or disownment, it can be utilised strategically to achieve rhetorical aims. 'Playing the race card' can be described as assigning an explicit race-related meaning to something that would otherwise not have been perceived that way, e.g. placing an incident, issue or argument within a broader meaningful race-narrative where blacks are the victims of white colonial oppression. In contrast to this, highly alert of a context in which it is rhetorically utilised against them, is the context in which what I shall term 'race fatigue' develops, wherein whites often propagate for the negation and denial of race. It is within this context that Max du Preez's column, 'There's a coloured in your vow, Sir' (Du Preez, 2008) in which an attempt was made to highlight the involvement of a coloured person in treasured Afrikaner history, attracted both positive and negative reactions from readers. For some the possibility that a 'coloured' person played a part in Afrikaner history held a positive meaning as it pointed to progress regarding racial integration; for others bringing race into the equation spoiled this otherwise highly valued piece of history, as was seen in sms reactions published in the issue that followed: 'Max, you are spoiling a beautiful piece of history. Bantjes was coloured. So what?' (*Bantjes en die gelofte*, 2008).

The above just illustrates how 'race' is a topic surrounded with heightened sensitivity, anger, negative connotations, fatigue, and the list of emotions can go on. Dynamics in newspapers, however, not only reflects this, but simultaneously contributes to it, as it can be claimed that much of the sensitivity accorded to 'race' by whites can be attributed to this media-induced racial 'frenzy'. A white-against-black representation is easy to sell, easy to grasp. The media create an agenda to such an extent that there is a market for it: racism, playing of the race card, tertiary institution transformation, etc. What is reported, discussed, and reacted on, influences societal narratives.

What makes this discourse among the white Afrikaans-speaking students racial? The racial habitus appears in how race-based experience is seated in dualistic distinctions, as well as in how a spatial distance is maintained and normalised without people necessarily being conscious of it. Within the SU context, this habitus gets particular salience as current language and transformation related debates further serve to polarise students on racial grounds. The defensive clinging to *Matie* identity coupled with silence on the racial politics on campus, points to a complex ambivalent discursive response to the perceived challenge of reconciling the Afrikaans character of Stellenbosch with transformation objectives. The notions of culture and ethnic identity are utilised in interesting ways to transcend this ambivalence, however, it also serves to conceal cognitive racial differentiation. The mere attempt at this concealment, as well as the ways in which students attempt to adapt their discourse to the university institution, points to awareness among students of the racial taboo. Seeing that the media take full advantage of this strong emotional connotation of this taboo, it manages to still reinforce society's capacity in making sense of experience in racially polarised ways. Due to the media's exploitation of the emotional baggage of race, it has also heightened the sensitivity surrounding it, which might have contributed to the silence and avoidance with which race is met among white Afrikaans-speaking students at Stellenbosch, an institution fighting its own battle of deracialization.

These are complex dynamics to understand, findings that are not arrived at by the simple weighing of data with the aim of arriving at a logical conclusion. It requires intense immersion into the experience of the students. My own relation to the university and its students provided a unique context for this research without which this deep immersion would, in all probability, not have been possible. I will now reflect on the fieldwork

experience, discussing some of its unique challenges and advantages, as well as the implications such a study might have for ethnography.



## Chapter 4: Reflection on Methodology

In this chapter some basic conventional assumptions regarding the relationship between researcher and researched in the ethnographic field context will be deconstructed. This will be done by describing how reaching findings through this research was not a matter of going into the field to get data, but of building a relationship to the site and its participants, creating a context in which 'data' was interactively generated. The complexity of intersubjectivity as a research tool, even though presenting immense difficulties, contributes to richness of interpretation. This deeply interpretive approach enables the incorporation of certain elements that would otherwise have been dismissed as trivial, but which in actual fact carry immensely significant implications for the study of race, discourse and white Afrikaans-speakers within the context of South Africa.

### 4.1 Complexity and uncertainty of the fieldwork experience

A particularly important aspect I learnt during the course of my fieldwork, is that an ethnographer's position in the field is not predetermined. Especially as an interviewer, one is not the only one laying claim to control over the interview encounter. Subjects can talk back and also lay claim to the research space (Boonzaier et al, 2005: 125). Evidently, the researcher must not enter the field with a predetermined notion of his/her position and must leave room for this position to be challenged, as well as negotiated in agreement with the participant, which can lead to a research setup which is 'messy' in the eyes of a scientist.

Furthermore, the fieldwork is often a very complex experience. The fieldwork experience has, to some degree, to be awkward and uncomfortable, compelling the fieldworker to grapple with himself, for it to become a valuable piece of work. Findings that do not rouse these type of emotions or lead to a situation of disillusionment and disruption can almost be seen as worthless data (Hume & Mulcock, 2004: xii). The fieldwork has to be difficult, lead to internal conflict, which in turn compels the researcher to seriously reflect on that which he has been confronted with (Hume & Mulcock, 2004: xviii). In short, if I were to go into the field and got exactly what I expected, I might as well ask what the use of the research would have been.

An example of such an experience would be where I attended discussion groups that had an overwhelmingly black student composition. As one of only a handful of whites dispersed through the crowd, I became extremely aware of my whiteness and Afrikaans-ness. Anger and frustrations were expressed by the participants, leveled against the white and 'Afrikaner' institutional structures of the university, thereby creating an atmosphere during the discussion in which a white Afrikaans student was regarded as 'other'. The realisation that my source of comfort (maybe even pride) is to them a source of frustration, exacerbated my otherness in that situation. Here I realised that I was being exposed to a context exactly the opposite of what I was studying, as my focus was mainly aimed at white students' 'othering' of blacks. I also became aware of the different discourses (white and black) that operate so independently from each other and being exposed to both caused frustration in me, as to the extent to which these do not seem to take heed of each other. At the end of the evening I felt emotionally drained and it was within this context of heightened emotion, sensitivity and trauma surrounding 'race' that I was able to locate white students' apparent apathy toward race-related politics on campus.

One aspect of anthropology that fundamentally distinguishes it from other sciences is the way it goes about with questions, usually not entailing clearly formulated questions and taking the answers to that, but engaging in an open-ended practice where questions are developed in an ongoing dynamic interpretive process. The notion of 'hard questions' has to do with the extremely difficult process, or even journey, that has to be undergone in the quest for 'answers'. Entering the interview setup with a pre-worked out set of questions and formulations does not suffice – the most important questions are those that are generated during the fieldwork process. It was for example in the context of interviews that I came to realise that participants' discourses do not answer to one single institution or framework, but alternately employ discursive strategies as they are confronted with various situations calling for various prioritising. The question 'how do students reconcile their need for the maintenance of Afrikaans with compliance with transformation?' also turned out to be a reductive approach when confronted with a complex situation where such a dilemma is rather met with silence, avoidance or ambivalence.

In accordance with Eriksen (2004: 45), the most important breakthroughs that provided me with the kind of disruptive experiences mentioned above, did not come via formal data-

gathering methods, like interviews or note-taking during observation, but rather during unplanned chance encounters and informal gatherings. Particularly one such incident that stood out for me was during a cocktail event where a white student, in an alcohol-induced talkative state, who was well familiarised with the coloured staff who helped out that night, began making jokes in their presence that everyone should do as he says, as he is the boss. To this the one coloured woman replied in the same joking tone something along the lines of 'Yes, he is white, so he is the boss'. Alerting the student to this possible interpretation of what he had just said, he seemed to suddenly be at unease on how to react as his joyous drunken state suddenly toned down into silence. This encounter, in conjunction with cases where the 'race' topic was brought forth in undergraduate class discussions, alerted me to how introducing the topic of 'race' into a seemingly non-racialised space is often met with uncomfortableness or tension, particularly by white subjects. This helped to contextualise the racial experience of white Afrikaans-speaking subjects.

## 4.2 Intersubjectivity

With regards to Boonzaier et al's (2005) notion of a 'citizen anthropologist' in this research the notion was taken to the extreme, as I was not merely a fellow South African citizen sharing a socio-historic space with these subjects, but am in fact a member of the category that I am studying, namely white, Afrikaans-speaking and a student at the University of Stellenbosch. Needless to say, this presents a great risk to objectivity. What I had to keep in mind was that sentiments that are being shared, and tendencies picked up, cannot simply be stored away long with a neat set of conclusions about the subjects under study, as not only do I form part of the same society that cherishes these interpretations (Boonzaier et al, 2005: 124), I, too, live according to, reinforce and maintain these ideas on a daily basis. I, for instance, actually identified with the girl who noted that the coloured and black girls always watch TV, because the same thought, along with the same interpretation, has entered my mind at some stage while I lived in a residence. In addition, I also often try and negotiate a more favourable definition for 'Afrikaners' as a strategic way of maintaining the position of my so valued resource, the Afrikaans language. Ultimately, it seems impossible to fully distance myself from these findings.

On the other hand, this intersubjectivity that my position as an insider accorded me, is simultaneously something that an anthropologist is dependant on (Favret-Saada, 1980: 23).

The intersubjectivity that results from my experience as a person, in this case my being an Afrikaans-speaking white female student from Stellenbosch, and possibly the milieu that I was raised in, was used as a tool during research. It assisted me in capturing a discourse as an insider. West (2005: 273) speaks of a 'third subjectivity' that is generated during interaction between researcher and researched which implies that no analysant independent of the analysed exists, and vice versa. Data for one's study are actually generated within the space of this third subjectivity. This again highlights the importance of participant observation wherein as soon as one steps outside the interaction one cannot ask about its 'truth', as its truth is solely situated within participation therein (Favret-Saada, 1980: 20). Furthermore, the intersubjective position that the researcher occupies at that moment of interaction is extremely important when interpreting what the respondent has rendered. An utterance can never be considered in isolation, but should be interpreted in the light of a situation where one *subject* spoke to another *subject*, with a certain extent of mutual understanding between them (Favret-Saada, 1980: 28).

#### **4.3 Meaning generated in the fieldwork context**

From this we can derive that the process during which data is gathered in fact does not so much involve the 'collection' of data as it does the 'production' of data. Data is in effect being generated between the various role-players – the researcher, subject and social context. That which ultimately comprises the object of study is not that which is being said during an interview but the interview situation itself (Puttergill and Leildé, 2006: 21). A mutual understanding is being generated between the researcher and researched in the interview context, and a researcher who does not account for that agreed-upon meaning afterwards to some or other extent can be seen as violating the agreement. This is immensely important in the investigation of racial discourse, to look not at merely what subjects say, but in how they construct meaning in what they say. One has, for instance, to look at how things become clear to an interviewee as the interview progresses, of how the interviewee goes through the process of reasoning the argument in order to clarify the issues under question for himself. Thus, importantly, instead of imposing a coherent meaning on the interview encounter, the encounter should be viewed as a complex, dynamic process by which meaning is generated by both interviewer and interviewee, often through a test and trial method.

It is my own experience with interviews that informants, in their conversation with me, often succeeded in expressing their own opinions on issues more clearly, not only to me, but also to themselves, and in the process get more clarity on the subject. The process of meaning-making thus not only occurs on the side of the interviewer, but also with the interviewee, with the implication that if there appears to be some coherent meaning to be deducted from the interviewee's response, it was often not a fact of a truth waiting to be expressed, but a truth constructed or generated within the interview encounter. So it is not only the interviewer who can impose meaning, but also the interviewee, which is the reason why interviewers should not take what is said to them at face-value but also look at the process by which the meaning conveyed to him/her is constructed within the interview context.

Informants often appeared to enjoy the interviews because these provided them the opportunity to clarify conflicting issues to themselves, for instance the conflict that exists between need for Afrikaans teaching weighed against the university being open to diversity. By conveying their experiences with transformation as positive experiences, respondents were able to convince themselves that such tensions can be transcended. In so doing they provided an idealistic ending to the 'story' of conflict and discord, or brought the strife situation to their own meaningful conclusion which provided them with clarity as to the 'solution'. Participants often seemed to embrace interviews as opportunities during which they could generate clarity on, for instance, what the De la Rey song means for them, on their expectation of the university and the country, of how they want 'Afrikaner' defined, etc.

Whenever a controversial comment was uttered, I was often tempted to leave it just there, as probing further into it would lead an interviewee to deliberate on it more deeply, realise its implications, and correct themselves, which would in turn impede the immediate effect that comment had when it was initially uttered. An assumption was reached that when utterances are made that can be interpreted in either a positive or negative light, informants want to keep their utterances in that space in between. Probing further into it would force their opinion into either extremes, either of which they would feel uncomfortable with, as they would feel it does not accurately represent how they feel. Attempting to classify people's consciousness into either the one or the other is also a

somewhat reductive enterprise as informants are continually in a process of moulding both their speech and thoughts in the context of interaction. The interview situation is not a case where a ready-made set of assumptions is simply reproduced, but a setting in which such assumptions are being revised and negotiated. It is thus interesting to see how interviewees justify themselves without me probing them to do so, illustrating the extent to which they are aware of the implications of what they are saying without me pointing it out to them.

Where students moulded and reshaped their statements in the light of my responses as interviewer, it could happen simply in reaction to probing questions, such as the following excerpt from an interview with a female student illustrates:

Interviewer: 'How would your parents react if you had a black or coloured boyfriend?'

Interviewee: 'Oh no, my parents won't like that at all. No, they are very conservative parents.'

Interviewer: 'I've often seen comments in newspapers about the fact that there are no interracial sexual relationships in *Sewende Laan* [a popular Afrikaans soap opera].'

Interviewee: 'Really? Oh no! I think if it comes to relationships people should stick to their own kind, as I just feel, if they get children, what would the child be? What race will the child be?'

Interviewer: 'So you feel that a person should be able to be classified? He must be able to identify himself as black, coloured or white?'

Interviewee: 'Yes, because you won't really have a race, or a specific... the children who result from this... I don't know.'

Interviewer: 'Why do you think it is important to have a race?'

Interviewee: '...Yes, yes, it probably doesn't matter what race you are...'

Interviewer: 'So is it important to have a racial identity?'

Interviewee: 'No, no not really, because... That's a good question, because it doesn't really matter in today's world whether you are white or brown or Indian. Apartheid was white, but it's not like that anymore, so it doesn't really matter what race you are. I don't think it is necessary anymore to fill in those forms that people always do. I don't think it is necessary to view people like that anymore, like when you apply for a job, they don't have to ask you what race you are. I think they should go according to merit and not look at race.'

Out of genuine curiosity, so as to get to the root of her assumptions about racial boundaries, I unintentionally compelled her to revise her framework, as it suddenly seemed to sound ungrounded to her in the light of my probing questions. Adapting her line of thought to one that embraces non-racialism, she simultaneously shifted the focus of the conversation to affirmative action, so that her non-racialism could serve as support for her view of affirmative action as wrong. It clearly seemed to me that she negotiated, and ultimately clarified, something to herself in the light of my questions, as if saying to herself: 'I should probably let go of my clear-cut view of racial identity, and so should affirmative action.' She translated the encounter from something that exposed her unsteady foundations, to support for an agenda she felt a need to discuss. Her possible realisation that the uncertainty of her framework has just been exposed was reacted upon through negotiation, with the aim of maintaining a positive self-presentation. Normalised assumptions do indeed get challenged and renegotiated within interviews, and the responses that are generated during such interactions are invaluable to research.

#### 4.4 Silence on race

Just as Favret-Saada's (1980: 10) study of witchcraft in the French Bocage, it was eventually discovered that that which forms a central part of the studied discourse is exactly that which is not being spoken about. Racial discourse among white Afrikaans-speaking youth, particularly as it manifests at Stellenbosch University, is in fact quite a challenging topic to do research on, as 'race' is very rarely explicitly raised as a topic of discussion. Only in rare cases was racial consciousness made explicit so that I was able to note down a direct quote for illustration. Throughout all other cases, however, it functioned more as a 'subtext' in everyday dealings.

An example would be an interview that was conducted with a house committee member of one of the few highly integrated residences at Stellenbosch, during which he refrained from explicitly referring to race although it was clear that his whole conversation centred around it. Throughout the interview he referred to 'the Afrikaans and English people' and the 'different cultures'. Other interviewees, one for instance who is a member of the *Voortrekkers*, did not hesitate to speak about 'race', though in a way that illustrates a very clear-cut view of the notion, accepting perceived differences at face value, and working toward reconciliation from there. We seem to either talk about race in a somewhat essentialist way, reinforcing the extent to which it shapes our thoughts; or we try avoiding it completely. Noticeable here is that in public discourse, and specifically in white Afrikaans-speaking discourse, we do not yet know how to speak of race in such a way so as to acknowledge the extent to which it shapes our thoughts, while simultaneously acknowledging its social constructiveness. It seems, ultimately, that there is no existing discourse at the moment that constructively deals with the notion of race.

Gal (1991: 175), in her study of gender speech patterns, contests the idea of silence as a sign of passivity, and proposes it being interpreted as a sign of political protest. Thus, silence is not necessarily a manifestation of a lack of power, but actually an exertion of power. So, instead of interpreting silence as a failure to respond, it could also be interpreted as a strategic response in itself, so that implicit in silence is often the message that speech cannot account for all that is felt. Could white Afrikaans-speaking students' silence on the race issue possibly be interpreted in such a light?

Turning to the issue of silence on racial matters among students, one can refer to one of the issues of the Stellenbosch student newspaper, *Die Matie*, in which a handful of students responded to a question on whether they have experienced racism on campus, in which none of them claimed to have encountered such issues (Lourens and Wahren, 2009). The reason for particularly being drawn to this seemingly trivial section in the issue was that it corresponded so well with my own fieldwork: white informants seemed oblivious of the existence of any racial tensions on campus. This can, however, be contrasted with black students' vocality on the subject at a 'just talk' discussion initiative, during which their experience with racism on campus was strongly expressed. One can also contrast the two discussions that were held during the same evening at different venues, both about race,



one mainly comprising black students, the other organised by the SRC, comprising mainly white students. I moved from the first to the latter during the course of the evening, from an atmosphere laden with emotion and anger, to a very calm reserved atmosphere discussing 'race' in a more 'academic' tone. 'Race' here surfaced as an issue of which its heavily laden political and emotional baggage are differently recognised by two respective groups.

Furthermore, during my search for interviewees, people suggested informants to me whom they knew were very vocal on the subject of Afrikanerdom, Afrikaans, race, etc. that is, people who were in some or other way involved with these issues through organisations, politics, hobbies, or personal interest. When searching for opinions that could be insightful to the issue under question, I was thus often referred to students in leadership positions, as they tended to be more verbally articulate on the issue of race and ethnic identity. But what about those who are not involved and decide to stay on the sideline? Many students were encountered who do not necessarily discuss these issues, who are *laissez-faire* and do not want to read the newspaper. It could be that they are simply not interested, but it could also be that they distance themselves from it for another reason. If they are silent on such issues, what do those silences or avoidances mean or say? This highlighted the importance of involving 'average students', as it occurred to me that collecting contributions that were less articulated or less strong, more 'silent' on the issue under investigation, could be just as insightful.

Turning to the implications these findings could have for my own ethnography, it could be said that everyday 'racial talk' is not merely harmless but *does* something, that is, it reproduces and maintains, or even *generates*, power relations. This process, though, has two faces with regard to Afrikaner racial talk: on the one hand there are the more right-wing people who tend to engage in talk that reproduces the perception of non-whites as inferior; on the other hand are those who distance themselves from right-wing views and engage in discourse expressing the idea of more racial equality. This is, though, a simplified classification, as in most 'Afrikaner discourses' there is often tension between the two viewpoints, and this is particularly one of the points I aimed to focus on in my research. Apart from the discourse of tension there also seems to be the discourse of those who place themselves outside of this debate entirely, preferring to remain 'silent' on the issue,

probably acknowledging that no existing discourse adequately accounts for the situation 'out there'. Evidently, silence on, or avoidance of, the topic of race, can possibly be read as indicators that no popularly circulating discourse currently provides a space for constructive and articulate engagement with the issue of race.

My previous research conducted on the De la Rey topic, where race merely formed the background, seemed to have evoked more race-associated responses, than the research for this thesis that was directly aimed at race. When confronted with the race issue first-hand, students were silent. Rather than mere disinterest, however, this silence might rather be considered in the light of a strategic response. In this case the apparent lack of 'data' pointed to something specific: there were reasons why white Afrikaans-speaking students felt the need to avoid the race topic, reasons that could only be identified through immersion into the context. This is ultimately what brought me to silence as a response to various dynamics: race as emotional baggage, as well as race as taboo within the context of the university as an institution. The 'voice' of an utterance, action or lack thereof, is further not only neglected when it is ignored, but also when the researcher refrains from internalising its meaningfulness, a point that will receive attention in the next section.

#### **4.5 Voice and functionality**

Reaping ideas from Favret-Saada's (1980: 4) approach during her witchcraft study, the question that should be asked when encountering incidents or utterances that can be described as 'racist', should not so much be that of a curious outsider asking 'what is the (hidden) motivation behind such talk', but rather a more insider-oriented approach asking 'what are people trying to express through such a discourse?' Acknowledging a discourse as meaningful in its own terms enables one to gain more insight into it than any 'objective scientist' would ever be able to. It is through this that Favret-Saada alerts the reader to how careful one must be to make immediate distinctions between 'our right/true beliefs' and 'the other's 'untrue beliefs' – such evaluative distinctions serve to silence the 'other's' means of expression as it is then passed off as irrational, wrong, absurd, etc. If taking a paternalistic outlook on their discourse, we silence their means of expression by passing it off as 'wrong'.

I attempted to move away from the interpretation of 'Afrikaner racial discourse' as one-track-mindedly geared toward defence and preservation of privilege. Acquisition of an emic perspective, crucial to ethnography, requires the understanding and representation behind a practice in such a way that I can see myself as able to entertain such a viewpoint. I thus have to convincingly ascribe some extent of legitimacy to it before I adopt a critical attitude toward it. Instead of a discourse solely aimed at a defence of privilege, it must also be seen as a discourse which, through creative means, answers to a wide array of needs in the speakers, e.g. securing themselves on both spiritual and material level in what they experience as a very insecure environment. This endeavour is exceedingly creative and utilises signifiers from the environment, like the media, parents, peers, and all other types of everyday experience. Depicting Afrikaner discourse as single-mindedly geared toward a single goal denies this creativity. A further problem is that 'backward thinking', 'racism' and 'prejudice' are often depicted as the ultimate evil, whereas it is not the role of the social anthropologist to identify and point out 'evil' in the first place.

As application to my own study, it could be said that exactly the same approach should be taken with racial discourse, namely that it should not be dismissed as irrational and untrue offhand, but that it should be studied for its meaningfulness and functionality to the subjects engaging in it. One of the characteristics of race discourse is that adherents make use of derogatory racial terms only when in the company of people who can 'appreciate' it, whereas refraining from it in the official South African national discourse. Such views are not conveyed with the aim of carrying across information; it is only shared with someone caught in the meaning, where you know the listener's disposition allows for an immediate uptake of your utterance. The function of the utterance would then not be to 'convey information' but to reinforce the status quo. One student who is originally from a fairly conservative rural town background, assumed that my identity as white, Afrikaans, fellow small-town resident, provided the possibility for an immediate uptake of his claims. To him, the interview setup served not as an opportunity to convey information, but to reinforce a framework. In responding to the question of what he thinks of the insistence that the University of Stellenbosch should incorporate more English during lectures, he said:

'Yes, see, why? I couldn't understand a word of English, or I could speak a little English when I got here, I had to adapt, especially academically. But they, see, they

want everything to be done for them, don't they? I mean, that's not right, understand, think about us Afrikaners who had to adapt. Now why can't they adapt and also start learning Afrikaans stuff, and, understand...'

His use of certain Afrikaans words illustrating his engagement with me as the listener to his discourse, assuming my identification with his situation, illustrates his perception of entering a space where we can agree. These words can best be translated into English with 'see', 'understand' (*'verstaan'*) or 'don't they?' (*'mos'*). Furthermore, he uses 'us' (Afrikaans-speaking whites) and 'they' (blacks) in a way so as to assume my simultaneous identification with these pronouns. In doing so he wanted to establish solidarity between the two of us in his expressed sentiments, as he feels strongly about it and needs others to feel strongly about it too. Engaging me within his racial worldview presented a dilemma, as it is not the ethnographer's place to openly challenge or reproach a respondent's viewpoint, especially not in the name of establishing rapport. The first thing that I, as ethnographer, should have done in such a situation is to listen, consider, and then probe, the aim of which would be to understand the meaning and function behind the production of such utterances. After gaining insight, I had to take a standpoint myself on these issues, however, in this case for example, that reproducing frameworks such as cited above, in which non-whites are being othered, is detrimental to constructive racial discourse in the South African context.

Each of these methodological insights have implications for the study of racial discourse among white Afrikaans-speaking youth who find themselves within the context of a historically white and Afrikaans-medium South African university. A disconcerting experience compelling me to grapple with myself, firstly, urged me to formulate hard questions that have not been asked before, and secondly, helped me realise the complexity of the situation at Stellenbosch, a university housing various students who all value certain things (language, access to education), as well as carry certain historical baggage with them into the setting. The question can be asked as to if I was more distanced from this setup – e.g. not myself a student, white, Afrikaans-speaking or South African, or were I even older – how would the interpretation have differed? The point illustrates that distance is not necessarily desirable, as it might limit the extent to which an intersubjective space can be shared with the participant.

In this research, race, instead of forming a clearly identifiable part of discourse, served more as a subtext to frameworks and conceptualisations. The particular gravity and seriousness surrounding race was particularly highlighted by the silence with which it was met. Furthermore, a fine balance must be maintained between not allowing the subject to lose voice, and to simultaneously take a stance oneself that might be unapologetic to the informant's sentiments. Key here is to first consider the utterance from the emic perspective before taking distance from it. The interview is not a case where a researcher extracts information from a subject, but is a dynamic process generating its own unique meaning, which means that the researcher has quite a task ahead of him in making sense of this fieldwork encounter. This data can though prove to be very rich in the end.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

An attempt has been made to establish the extent to which certain racial frameworks (still) shape the way white Afrikaans-speaking students make sense of and come to terms with their surroundings, as well as how this framework is potentially transcended or adjusted so as to adapt to changing circumstances. It has also been illustrated how all these processes are influenced by larger narratives circulating in society, e.g. socio-historical knowledge, perception, sense-making and, of course, the media. A potential theme for this thesis could alternatively be 'the ambivalence of the race topic in South Africa' which would be referring to the wide range of meanings that the concept of 'race' holds: from a source of self-identification, to something carrying historical connotations, heavily and negatively laden, to a source of sensation for the media.

Within the scope of this study, focus was aimed particularly at the ambivalence that 'race' holds for SU students. The unique situatedness of the subjects being studied, that of being students at a historically Afrikaans-medium university, grappling with transformation and language issues, revealed some unique findings, as the discursive dynamics proved to be much more complex than a simple situation where white Afrikaans-speaking students simply rely on a generationally transmitted discourse in orientating themselves. An important finding is the extent to which the situation at SU influences the way that subjects mould and adjust their priorities, and consequently their discourse. Thus, the university as an institution, its institutional values and ideals, calls for an adjustment of students' institutional orientation. In short, it calls for their priorities to be aligned with the university's institutional values. In the context of highly integrated residences, this can also be seen as a means of coping and surviving. In the end, many white students creatively manage to attribute positive value to integration and diversity through the use of terms such as 'exposure to different cultures', 'preparation for the world out there', 'paradigm shift' etc., enabling them to cope with a situation that otherwise presents a grave challenge to received frameworks. As the university as an institution attempts to adapt to broader social change, so do its students.

Yet, such a process can only be operated from a foundational framework that is already in place. The salience of a habitus based on racial distinctions is manifested in various ways. In spite of an attempt to move away from the racial rhetoric, 'culture' is still employed as a means of establishing and articulating differences. Some further research could be undertaken as to the extent to which the cultural rhetoric is reinforced in South African national discourse, as this is surely not limited exclusively to 'Afrikaner' conversational conventions, but something in which all South Africans partake.

Actions and utterances encountered during fieldwork in most cases served various functions. Firstly, aligning one's discourse with an established set of assumptions shared by the listener, is done in order for communication or the transfer of meaning to occur successfully. In this regard, instances were identified where respondents spoke to me, the interviewer, as fellow white, fellow Afrikaans-speaking, fellow student as they expressed assumptions which they assumed I shared, or was at least familiar with, given my social background. Secondly, the function of discourse in exercising power was manifested in their aligning their utterances with institutions underlying whiteness and/or Afrikaner values, creating an indexical space where the listener is lead to become complicit in their worldviews. Utterances were also, however, simultaneously aligned with institutions underlying the desirability of change, particularly, here, the university's institutional concerns surrounding transformation, as well as the broader institution of democratic post-apartheid South Africa. This could for instance be seen in the 'othering' of racism and other 'outdated' frameworks, and relates to the function of discourse in controlling for a positive self-presentation.

The negotiation of a characterization of the 'Afrikaner' is considered against the background of negative associations accorded to *Afrikanerdom* due to the apartheid history which brought about a need to mould this image into one that is compatible with current-day institutional interests. Such a process that takes place within the context of interaction, apart from shaping the way they are viewed by others, more importantly serves to establish how they perceive themselves in relation to their surroundings. In spite of attempts to move away from it, this identification process is still highly characterised by racial differentiation and dualist schemas constructed along the lines of racial differences. This, however, ultimately serves as the basis from which the negotiation of an identity in accordance with

currently favoured principles occurs. Applying an anthropology of discourse relating to power dynamics, one could say that even as an academic, thinking oneself free of these 'racist', 'narrow' classificatory thought patterns that the 'uneducated public' so frequently use, one is in fact only 'coming to consciousness in terms of one particular system of discursive classification' (Rapport & Overing, 2000: 121), in this case the concepts and theories I, as a student, have at my disposal. One is then, in effect, once again only allowing a preconditioned linguistic code to speak on one's behalf, which brings to the fore the question of whether it is at all possible to practice free and independent thoughts that is not, in some or other subtle way, shaped by some system. Thus it could be said that we are always and everywhere entangled in some thought structure or discourse, and consequently in some form of power relations. Evidently, these power relations that I am supposedly deconstructing are often something that I am caught in.

The great challenge for white South Africans, as has been so often highlighted, would be to grasp the full extent of their privileges and history, operating all further negotiations and claims from the basis of that acknowledgement. Only then will South Africans be able to communicate on level ground, as that piece of denial tends to stand in the way of reconciliation. On the other hand, we can only work on mistakes if we acknowledge them, and we can only acknowledge them if it is not a shame or disgrace – otherwise people will simply distance themselves from race-based thinking as something to be ashamed of, as indeed they appear to do, without necessarily deracialising.. The taboo surrounding 'race' impedes any further constructive dialogue, and consequently, deliberation, on the matter. This could be seen as resulting in frustrations coming to the fore in unconstructive ways, such as white Afrikaans-speakers reinforcing a victim rhetoric among each other, even culminating into 'racist incidents' that enjoys widespread media attention, such as was seen at the University of the Free State (Cloete, 2008) and US (Venter, 2009). This research has shown me that, as a white Afrikaans-speaking young person living in South Africa, openly coming to terms with our understanding of 'race' will assist us in coming to terms with our own position in the country.



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'Taal, harmonie nuwe rektor se kopseer'

'In nuwe koshuis is dit soort soek soort'

'In naasteliefde sáám in dié blyplek'

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